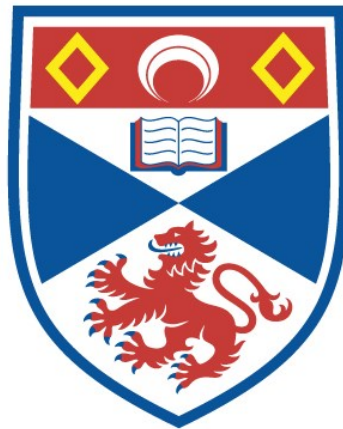


FACEBOOK, FRIENDSHIP AND FAITH: CONNECTING PRACTICES OF YOUNG ADULT CHRISTIANS

Cathryn A. Van Landuyt

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews



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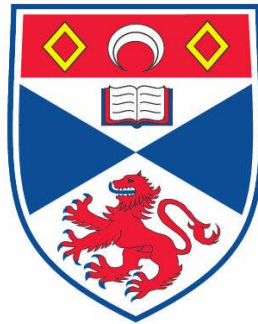
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Facebook, Friendship and Faith:
Connecting Practices of Young Adult Christians

Cathryn A. Van Landuyt



This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews

31 January 2014

Abstract

This research is about practising friendship as a Christian in contemporary contexts. The thesis uses methods of practical theology, explained in the first chapter, to explore three practices that are important to many young adult Christians: Facebook, friendship and faith. In Chapter 2 we attend to descriptions of Facebook and friendship practices of young adult Christians based on qualitative research conducted through fieldwork. Models are developed to organize assumptions and values of the participants and provide a framework for analysis. In Chapter 3 the practices are placed in the context of wider social/cultural dimensions in order to recognize ways the young people involved in the fieldwork are following culture and where they are being counter-cultural. In Chapter 4 we view what are interpreted as value-laden practices alongside various theologies of friendship. In the fifth chapter the social/cultural aspects of friendship practices encounter and engage with the theological perspectives. The analysis is based on an understanding of the relationship between faith practices and the 'wider culture' that has been established by the preceding chapters. The final stage of an initial iteration of the practical theology cycle is implementation of reformed practices, illustrated by examples and conclusions in Chapter 6.

This application of the practical theology cycle raises consciousness of the need for connection of personal practices and becomes a catalyst for a continuous cycle of examining and reflecting on experiences, contexts, and faith perspectives. The theological voice of young adult Christians is heard and valued in realizing friendship as a means of fulfilling a call in Christ.

Declarations

1. Candidate's declarations:

I, Cathryn A. Van Landuyt, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 80,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

I was admitted as a research student in September 2010 and as a candidate for the degree of PhD in October 2011; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 2010 and 2014.

Date 31st January 2014

2. Supervisor's declaration:

I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of PhD in the University of St Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

Date 28th January 2014

3. Permission for electronic publication:

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The following is an agreed request by candidate and supervisor regarding the electronic publication of this thesis:

Access to all of printed copy but embargo of all electronic publication of thesis for a period of three years on the following grounds:

publication would preclude future publication;

31st January 2014

28th January 2014

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Chapter 1. Introduction and Methodology

Dear friends,

In just over two weeks' time, shortly before I head back up to St Andrews, I am disabling Facebook. If I don't shrivel up and die from not being connected for a month, I'm going to go ahead and delete my account. Why? A few reasons ...

Why am I writing you to tell you all this? It's not to try and convert you to my way of thinking or to make you quit too (though I would strongly urge you to be at least aware of how Facebook uses your data and issues of privacy).

No. I'm writing to you because I value your friendship and want to keep in touch with you after I leave Facebook, which, as we know, is the only way people can keep in contact with each other these days. So I've come up with a list of other ways you can keep in touch with me.

Email – yes I know it's old and what your granny uses to contact you, but email is a great way of keeping in touch. I love receiving emails from people telling me what they are up to in life. It's a little bit special. Gives a warm glow inside, you know. So go on. Spoil yourselves a bit. Learn how to email again. Tell me about your summers. About your heroes in life. About your desires for the next year. Plus, me having your email addresses means I can send you the links to photos I want to share, meaning you can still see what I am up to!

You could text or ring me. I'm chatty. You know that. I love to chat. Getting me to shut up is trickier. But I love to chat. So why not ring me and do it in person. Instead of 'liking' a status message, why not make it a point to ring me once a fortnight or drop me a text every few days. I can tell you about the latest cakes I've baked or my latest crazy story. And I'm always up for a Skype text chat if you like instant messaging – and I do. So come and virtually join me over breakfast or in an evening by Skype chatting and know we can chat without Facebook suddenly blanking the conversation.

For those real romantics (or arts students), you could also write. In case you're confused (I was when planning this message), writing is something you do with a pen, paper and envelope. Stretch your mind back and remember the excitement of getting a letter in the post? Got it? Not quite? Try? There we go. So let's share some of this love and excitement around and write

to each other, during the holidays if you go to Uni with me, or during Uni time if you live near me at home. Sound good?

Events? Please don't just not invite me to events because it's no longer simple to click on a picture of my face in the event invitations app in Facebook. Text me. Ring me. Email me. Send me a pigeon. Attach it to a brick and chuck it over the fence. I do still exist!

It obviously goes without saying I am always up for going to the pub for a drink, catch up and chat or having random visitors turn up on my doorstep completely unannounced wanting food. So let's do that :)

There we go. I'm giving you contact details because I value your friendship and want it to continue (and grow) even though I'm leaving the ubiquitous form of communication. I hope you understand my motivation – and I apologise for the length of explanation. I look forward to catching up with you soon.

Let's join the journey of rediscovering old forms of communication and meanwhile I will use my free time to get started on those cakes.

With all my love

Daniel¹

1.1 What the research is about and accomplishes

Daniel is a young adult Christian practicing friendship at a time when Facebook seems to be a ubiquitous tool for staying in touch with others and knowing what is going on socially. Although Facebook offers the opportunity to 'Connect with friends and the world around you on Facebook',² being in relationship with others has never been simple. Maintaining consistency among practices in a fast-paced, multi-tasking environment is difficult, as Daniel indicated in his letter to his friends. Christians look to their faith to seek meaning and guide practices in an environment crowded with alternatives. Methods of practical theology engage in consideration of practices that embody assumptions and values expressed in conversations,

¹ This is a letter of a young adult Christian who participated in the research for this thesis. It was sent to his Facebook-friends via Facebook and later shared with the researcher.

² Facebook. 2013. "Connect with friends and the world around you on Facebook," Facebook homepage, accessed March 28, 2013, <https://www.facebook.com/>.

discerned from actions, and recognized within context, in relation to Christian tradition, scripture and theological understandings. To realize the value of theory of practical theology, it must be applied to concrete practices in the experience of Christians. Reflection based on allowing practices to question and respond to each other and to theoretical understandings may bring about changes in the practices or personal theologies, such as described by Daniel in his letter to his friends.

Young adult Christians engage in practices of Facebook, friendship and faith that impact their lives and those around them. They all relate to friendship but it appears that in practice they are often considered discretely or without attending to a connection between them. For a life lived with coherence, there should be recognition of the relationship of the three practices and effort made to connect them. To facilitate this connection as an ongoing process, this thesis will apply methods of practical theology to the questions:

How do young adult Christians practise friendship on Facebook?

How are practices of young adult Christians affirmed and challenged by, or are themselves affirming and challenging, other Christian understandings of friendship?

In considering these questions, we examine issues in the practices of Facebook, friendship and faith as the experience, context and theology of friendship. The research is based on responses in the fieldwork that provide fragments and hints of theological values expressed as young adult Christians discuss their use of Facebook in their practices of friendship. The arguments affirm through fieldwork and analysis that the participants do embody their assumptions and values in their Facebook friendship practices as they are situated within particular social and technological contexts. However, their Facebook-friendship practices both affirm and challenge theological understandings of friendship. Theological reflection promotes the encounter and engagement of pertinent issues from each analysis. Using these methods of practical theology, revised practices of Facebook, friendship and faith of young adult Christians connect through intention, discernment, affirmation, and demonstration in a theological voice expressed through social media.

This project builds on and adds to the considerable body of knowledge in a number of areas in researching a practical application of a theoretical model. The social sciences provide frameworks for subjective qualitative research that are relied upon in many disciplines including sociology, psychology, education, anthropology, philosophy (Denzin and Lincoln

1998b, 5). Action research moves from the development of knowledge into action within an involved group (Cameron et al. 2010, 36). Practical theology offers the methodologies for systematically considering and reflecting on practices of believers in the church (Swinton and Mowatt 2006). Theological Action Research uses action research to bring processes and skills to the practical theology goals of making connections between theology, Christian tradition, and faith practice in present situations (Cameron et al. 2010, 36). Methods, structures and strategies are ultimately at the service of the participants, the data, and the researcher as tools that can be used towards the goal of gaining beneficial knowledge. This project applies the tools of the disciplines to consider a tool for communication within friendship by investigating Facebook-friendship practices. An additional outcome of this project is the effect it produces through asking, listening, describing, learning, and reflecting on one common but very significant practice – that of friendship.

There have been numerous studies on social media in recent years, including how it affects and is effected by users, organizations, society, politics, and ministry. Based on the analysis of experience, situation, and theologies, it becomes clear that these research questions are part of the bigger debate and wider discussion of how church relates to culture. A long-standing and ongoing issue, this project sits on the framework that has been built by theologians and moves it forward, incorporating relevant theories of formation, culture, and missiology into the actual experience and practice of contemporary friendship that encompass technology and consumerism.

1.2 Organizational structure

The fieldwork in this project focused on Facebook practices of young adult Christians. Analysis of their comments revealed assumptions and values that, although not articulated using specifically theological vocabulary, conveyed their theological understandings. From responses gathered in interviews and focus groups, four models were developed to give structure to their voices and seek meaning. Comments were organized as they related to Categories of Friends, Levels of Friendship, Types of Posts, and Frequency and Disclosure. From analysis of the models, the main points moving forward for encounter and engagement with the other practices relate to: (1) the origination and purposes of friendships; (2) how friendships persist and are maintained at different levels; (3) witness or evangelism through disclosure; and (4) that missiological purposes might be realized through friendship.

In the situational analysis of the practical theology cycle, friendship practices are considered more generally than just as practices on Facebook. Pertinent theoretical considerations include the development stage, generational influences, social contexts, and identity issues. Also important within the situational analysis are the influences on friendship of technology and consumerism. This thesis will argue through analysis of the experience and of the situation that Facebook friendship practices of young adult Christians demonstrate assumptions and values situated within particular social and technological contexts.

Theologies of friendship will add to the discussion by bringing in consideration of Christ's examples of friendship, as well as understandings of friends as gifts from God, friendship as a school of Christian love, and friendship with God. In light of the fieldwork, the argument is made that Facebook friendship practices of young adult Christians both affirm and challenge, and are themselves affirmed and challenged by, theological understandings of friendship.

Theoretical frameworks support encounters of faith and culture in regard to formulations of friendship. These encounters include considerations of how friendship originates, including a theology of friendship through and from God as well as entering into friendship even when inconvenient. Examples of encounter of practices related to the persistence of friendship include recognition of the importance of convenience in addition to consideration of the functional aspects in the maintenance or dissolution of friendships.

Traditional understandings of culture itself are reconsidered in the engagement of practices related to the activities of witness and mission in friendship. Questions and issues of identity, disclosure, sharing, and sacrifice relate to commitment in friendship. Friendship as message, mandate, and mission, emerge in the encounters that struggle for fuller understandings of friendship practices. These considerations involve consumerism as well as difficult theological ideas such as friendship with God.

Through the connection of practices in engagement and encounter, young adult Christians may express their assumptions and values with revised practices of Facebook, friendship and faith that are more intentional, discerning, affirmative, and demonstrative. Several examples illustrate how this research moves the discussion from theory to practice. This application of the practical theology cycle is intended to raise consciousness and become a catalyst for a continuous cycle of examining and reflecting on experiences, contexts, and faith perspectives.

Table 1.1 summarizes the application, analysis and interpretation of the method used in this study and explained in the following sections.

TABLE 1.1.

Theory: Swinton & Mowat's stages in practical theology	Application: practices to consider and connect	Analysis: questioning
Experience as models	Facebook practices	What participants said – how they use Facebook
Situational analysis	Friendship practices	How participants practise – in the context for their practices of friendship
Theological analysis	Faith practices	What participants hear – from the church about friendship
Synthesis of analyses (revised practices)	Practices encounter, engage, and connect	What participants express – in their friendships through social media

1.3 Practical theology method utilized

Practical theology is concerned with the experience of Christians seeking to live faithfully within the world. John Swinton and Harriet Mowat present a well-considered description of, and structured methodology for, engaging in practical theology using tools of qualitative research. Their model provides the framework for this study. It is augmented by the model and descriptions of Emmanuel Lartey.

Swinton and Mowat offer a provisional definition as a guide for understanding the role of practical theology as used in their model.

Practical Theology is critical, theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practices of the world, with a view to ensuring and enabling faithful participation in God's redemptive practices in, to and for the world. (Swinton and Mowat 2006, 6)

In this understanding, the authors make several points which emphasize the critical, theological, contextual, and goal aspects of the practical theology endeavour, based on the assumption that there is truth and it can be known. Allowing enquiry to be critical is an acknowledgement that Christian practices are meaningful and worthy of reflection. In

questioning and reflecting on assumptions and practices based on experience, the experiences are themselves validated as authentic and to be taken seriously.

An understanding of what is meant by 'practice' is fundamental to a practical theology project focusing on particular practices.³ Worship, prayer, and partaking in the sacraments are practices of the Christian church that demonstrate obedience and bind believers together. They are corporate expressions of the visible church that are fundamental to Christian identity. Christians also practice their faith in their individual acts of obedience and response. Swinton and Mowat describe their usage of the term 'practice' as neither referring solely to application or technique nor as practical theology engaging with the procedures administered by professional clergy (Swinton and Mowat 2006, 17). Practice involves the actions of lay Christians that reflect their own theological understandings. Friendship may be considered as both a Christian practice and as a practice of Christians. Further, practical theology does not presume that the value of a practice is found only in the effect of the practice. Practical theology is interested in the meaning and purposes of the actions of Christians (Swinton and Mowat 2006, 19).

Practical theology calls for a response based in theology but one that is set within the context of the situation within the world. This context is one in which Christians and non-Christians together reside in what Christians recognize as a broken world in which man is unable to reconcile himself to God by his own efforts or practices. The Church differs from the world in its recognition of Jesus as the means of redemption but consciously seeks to live in the world in ways that recognize and bear witness to that revelation. As a result of this recognition, practices of Christians may differ from similar practices of the world at a very fundamental level. This becomes apparent when practices are reflected on theologically to discover motivation and meaning, with the goal being to move towards integrity in understanding, words, and action. Practical theology can be realized as theoretical in its attempt to comprehend practices but also practical in its goal of effecting practices towards faithful response. As Swinton and Mowat describe it:

While at one level it certainly begins with and takes seriously human experience, that experience is neither the goal nor the end-point of practical theological reflection.

³ This thesis will use the terminology of 'practices' and 'revised practices', consistent with the methodology of Swinton and Mowat.

Rather, the goal and end-point of Practical Theology is to ensure, encourage and enable faithful participation in the continuing gospel narrative. (Swinton and Mowat 2006, 10)

Swinton and Mowat argue that by both ‘complexifying’⁴ and understanding the situation, the perspective of Practical theology recognizes how the situation really is and envisions how it could be different. ‘Complexifying’ requires looking at a practice such as friendship as much more than a casual connection enabled through Facebook where two people agree to be identified as ‘friends’. Upon theological reflection, perhaps as prompted by using methods of practical theology, one starts to consider questions such as:

Do I see my friendship practices as faithfully responding to my understanding of God’s command to love one another?

Are my friendships with other Christians mutually helpful in following and growing closer to Christ?

Are there theologically sound reasons to maintain connections, such as Facebook-friend connections, with people at all levels of friendship?

If Facebook is a significant factor in the current practices of friendship, what is its role in my practices of friendship as a Christian?

Recognizing the complexity of a situation leads towards understanding the purposes and meanings of practices and is critical to theological engagement with it. Swinton and Mowat provide the four-stage framework of Figure 1.1 for the model that emerges from the process they describe.

⁴ ‘Complexifying’ is a term used by Swinton and Mowat in their explanation of the process.

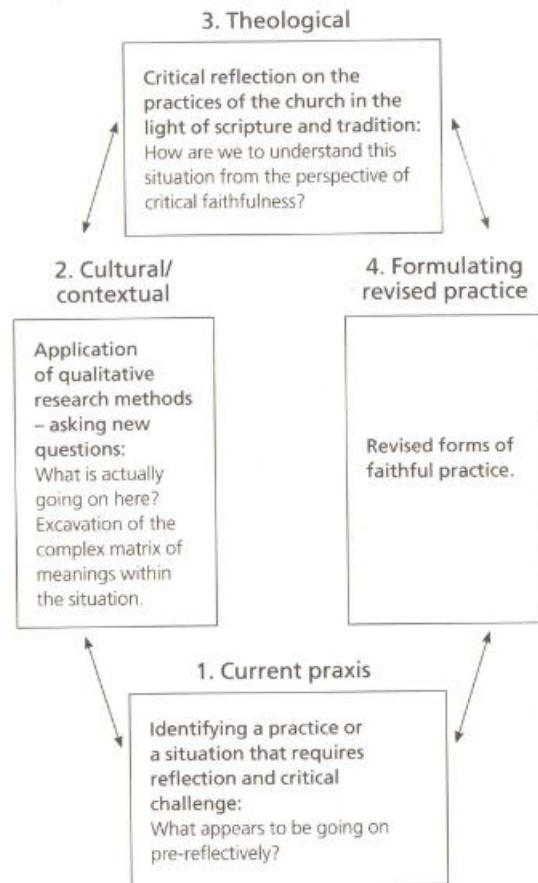


FIGURE 1.1. (Swinton and Mowat 2006, 95)

Stage 1 is the identification of a current practice that requires reflection and critical challenge. It is at this point that key issues are identified. The initial research question is expected to develop and change as the process unfolds and more is revealed in the analysis than is initially perceived. Stage 2 is the cultural/contextual analysis where the initial reflections are augmented through dialogue with the various disciplines involved. A fuller understanding of the dynamics of the situation then develops. Theological reflection becomes more directly applied in Stage 3 as both implicit and explicit dimensions of the situation are sought and considered in their meaning as interpreted through scripture, tradition, and theology.

Although this study is purposefully structured by using the approach and methodology described by Swinton and Mowat, its application is enhanced here by the ‘pastoral cycle’ model of Lartey, illustrated in Figure 1.2.

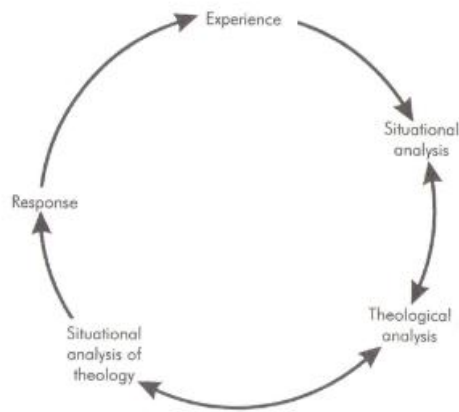


FIGURE 1.2. (Lartey 2000, 75)

Lartey's model shows a critical step implied by the double-headed arrows but not illustrated as a separate stage in Swinton and Mowat's cycle of practical theological reflection. Between Swinton and Mowat's Stage 3 (Theological reflection) and Stage 4 (Formulating revised practice), Lartey's model includes a phase labelled 'Situational analysis of theology'. This is described as follows:

In the fourth phase it is my faith perspectives that are the subject of questioning by the encounter and the situational analysis. The God of all creation may in reality be 'standing at the door knocking' through what has been encountered (Revelation 3:20). Experience and situational analysis may offer more adequate reformulations of Christian doctrine. (Lartey 2000, 76)

This is where encounter and challenge occur and theology is shaped to both articulate and act in response. For this project, Lartey's model is deliberately brought in to augment the model provided by Swinton and Mowat because it seemed imperative to explicitly include this step to describe the activities of encounter and engagement of the practices. Analysis of the work of Swinton indicates that his theology privileges scripture, with which I do not disagree. This perspective may explain reluctance to propose a radical critique of theology. However, consistent with established methods of practical theology including Swinton's own process, mutual challenges and responses of the social analysis and theological positions are encouraged at this stage of the process. The fourth phase of Lartey's model demonstrates this step more explicitly than the Swinton and Mowat model.

Lartey's fifth activity is one of exploring response options with a group engaging with practical theology. The expectation is that 'the person-in-community recognizes and acts responsibly in the light of the vision and revisioning encountered' (Lartey 2000, 76). This corresponds with the fourth stage in the practical theological reflection depicted in the Swinton and Mowat cycle of formulating and enacting revised forms of faithful practice based on the cultural/contextual analysis of and theological reflection on the initial experience explored.

Swinton and Mowat acknowledge that their model is based on the pastoral cycle and the hermeneutical circle in its theological aspects, and methods of action research in its use of tools of qualitative research (Swinton and Mowat 2006, 97). In appropriating methods used in the social sciences that are designed to enable a transformative process in the situation under investigation, they point out that when the methods are used as theological methods the goal is for achieving more faithful practices. These endeavours may well result in raising awareness of the implications of practices that are not easily altered; however, the process becomes a part of the consciousness of an ongoing journey towards faithful living.

Swinton's impressive body of work in practical theology, notably related to theologies towards those disadvantaged by health issues and disability,⁵ indicates a traditional theological background and prioritization of scripture. Lartey's work is orientated towards liberation theology but for this project his framework for engaging in practical theology is compelling. Among the many theologians and ideas that contributed significantly to the development of this project are Jeff Astley's recognition and discussions of Ordinary Theology; Helen Cameron's work with action research methodologies and theological reflection; and Kathryn Tanner's perspectives on culture. The influences of these theologians are key in the relating the social and theological analyses to the experiences described by the young adult Christian participants. A range of other sources on practical theology revealing the depth and diversity of the discipline were consulted throughout the processes of this project.⁶

1.4 Qualitative research – the type of research explained

Qualitative research is based on assumptions that words, actions, language and texts have meaning that can be considered and provide insights. It assumes that reality is less objective

⁵ Swinton 1999, 2000, 2012; Willows and Swinton 2000.

⁶ Anderson 2001; Ballard and Pritchard 1996; Brown, Greeve Davaney and Tanner 2001; Browning 1991; Cartledge 2003, 2010; Graham, Walton and Ward 2005, 2007; Miller-McLemore 2012; Ward 2008.

than sets of facts that can be understood through quantification (Denzin and Lincoln 1998a). Qualitative research is appropriate for this study because it recognizes that individual experience and social structures are subjective, related to beliefs, perceptions, feelings and emotions – which themselves may be conflicting within the individual participants and certainly in the broader social and theological contexts. Several general sources provided a basis for understanding and using sociological and qualitative research.⁷

Swinton and Mowat describe qualitative research as a detective story without a fixed ending.

It (qualitative research) involves the painstaking and complex process of unpicking the detail of who did what, when and why within particular situations and formulating this into evidence which will enable a fair judgment to be made. ... However, unlike the detective the qualitative researcher does not seek to solve the problem or 'crack the case'. She is very much aware that neither is possible. The evidence can tell many stories, and all of them contain varying degrees of truth. ... The researcher's task is to tell her story about the situation as well and as accurately as she can. (Swinton and Mowat 2006, 30)

This project is thus the story heard, interpreted, and told by listening for how the voices of one particular set of young adult Christians embody their assumptions and values as they engage in friendship using Facebook.

Using an inductive approach in qualitative research can provide natural and rich responses that allow significant issues to emerge. Categories, themes, and patterns are developed from the data into manageable models. This requires staying close to the data, a practice which will be recognized throughout this study. 'Staying close to the data is the most powerful means of telling the story ...' (Denzin and Lincoln 1998a, 47). In this project, we will never stray far from the data, allowing the voices of the young adult Christians to tell their story.

1.5 Fieldwork process – who was involved and what was done in gathering data

Young adult Christians were recruited to participate in the study through email inquiries to Christian student groups at two universities, a young adult Bible study group at a church, an informal gathering of Divinity students, graduate students working in the academic

⁷ Bilton et al. 1996; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Denzin and Lincoln 1998a, 1998b, 2000, 2003, 2011; Giddens 1991; Saldaña 2009.

department of the researcher, personal acquaintances, and snowball recruitment⁸ by prior contacts. Meetings were held in coffee shops, restaurants, university facilities, and church classrooms. There was no coercion to participate and no reward was offered for participation other than the researcher providing refreshments during the interview session. The researcher met with participants individually, in small groups of two to four people, and in two larger group settings, based on the availability of the participants.

In all cases, the participants were first given the University Teaching and Research Ethics Committee (UTREC)-approved Participant Information form to read. They then signed the Consent Form. An email address was only verbally requested in such a way as to be clear that it was entirely at their option to provide it for the purpose of thanking them for their participation and an invitation to follow-up to validate the interpretation of the data. Following each session, the Debriefing Form was made available to the participants. Copies of the Approval Letter for these forms are included in the Appendix. The sessions were recorded on a digital voice recorder to enable accurate transcription.

Before beginning most of the interviews and or focus groups, a questionnaire was used to gather information about the participants' everyday use of technology and social networking websites. A consistent set of questions was prepared for discussion but the order or inclusion of some questions varied based on the flow of the conversation. The participants were enthusiastic in their discussions of this topic with the researcher and particularly with their peers (when more than one respondent was involved in the discussion). The researcher made an effort to not lead the participants in their responses other than by introducing questions, indicating understanding of their responses, and encouraging clarification on the practices described when needed. The time spent in a session depended on how much the participants talked; in most cases, the conversations lasted between one and two hours.

Following each interview, the researcher sent an email to the participants who provided their email address (56%). The email thanked them for their participation, again explained the project, and offered some additional questions about friendship for their reflection and response. Approximately 20% responded to the follow-up email. Additionally, approximately 25% voluntarily initiated a Facebook-friend request to the researcher following the initial interview. All Facebook-friend requests made to the researcher were accepted.

⁸ Snowball recruitment is a technique where participants refer other potential subjects to the researcher.

A total of fifty participants signed the consent form and were involved in an interview or focus group. Additionally, approximately fifty young adult Christians, more than half of whom were not involved in the interviews but were aware of the research project, voluntarily made a Facebook-friendship request to the researcher. This allowed access to viewing their Facebook pages and observing how they practise friendship on Facebook. Use of data from these observations was included in the UTREC approval.

The responders were not asked their age on the survey instruments, but all participants were recruited from upper-level high school (at least 18 years old), college, and young adult church or para-church groups, providing a range from approximately 18-35. Denominational backgrounds given by the participants on the questionnaire included Reformed traditions (Presbyterian and Church of Scotland), Catholic, Anglican, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and non-denominational. 49% of the interview participants were American, 48% were British (including Scottish and Irish), and 3% were German or Canadian.

Pseudonyms have been used in this text for fieldwork participants.

1.6 Analyzing the qualitative data – what was done with the data

After multiple interviews, the content of the discussions began to appear repetitive and initial contacts for interviews had either resulted in an interview or were considered not viable due to lack of response. The interview period lasted approximately four months, from September to December 2011, although the researcher remained open to contacts. Several additional interviews were conducted after the initial period. As soon as possible after the interviews took place, the recording of the interview was listened to and transcribed into a text document by the researcher. The transcriptions were read numerous times and the recordings listened to again for clarification if necessary. In some instances the transcriptions were annotated with comments related to the interview that were not included in the recording. This was an iterative, rather than a linear, process of listening and reading the content of the interviews. The interview transcriptions were connected by creating a new document based on the questions asked and topics discussed. This document was coded and categorized into concepts that emerged from the interviews (Saldaña 2009). These concepts were developed into models to represent Facebook practices described by young adult Christians.

Development of models – how the data was organized

Based on the content of the interviews, the models that were developed depicted practices that related to: (1) categorization of friends; (2) different methods of communicating based on depth of friendships; (3) variations in frequency of posting and disclosure among Facebook users; and (4) variety in the types of posts used for communicating through Facebook. A graphic to visually represent the findings of each model was designed and is presented in Chapter 2.

The focus of this study is on the friendship relationships most generally associated with practices of Facebook. While Facebook use among family members and significant others came up in some of the discussions, the research revealed that in such cases interaction through Facebook is primarily used for convenience and is incidental to the nature of the relationships. Thus, as practices of friendship they are not applicable to this research project of more general friendships connected through Facebook.

Validation process – how the results were verified

After the models were developed from the fieldwork interviews, participants who had provided an email address at the time of their focus group or interview were contacted by email and asked to validate a summary of findings that were depicted by the models. Sixteen participants responded to the request to either meet again with the researcher (seven) or to review the summary text provided and reply by email (nine) with their responses. This response provides validation by approximately one third of the participants. The text used in the validation summary is included with the responses in Chapter 2.

Use of the models in analysis – how the models were used

Aspects of the situational and theological analysis were organized in relation to the models. The order of the models is presented in subsequent chapters based on a logical sequence for discussing the data. This approach ensured that both the situational analysis and the theological analysis were narrowed to be applicable to the fieldwork as opposed to being quite broad considerations of sociological and theological understandings of friendship. Dialogue between the context and the theology was then established by using issues from the analyses as they related to the same fieldwork model. Applicable aspects of each analysis were brought together to encounter, engage, and connect practices based on significant topics emerging from the synthesis of the two perspectives.

The final stage in the initial cycle of practical theology is the Formulation of Revised Forms of Practice (Swinton and Mowat) or Response (Lartey). The research with the participants in the initial fieldwork was not ongoing but several illustrations of response or revision of practices of young adult Christians that result from theological reflection demonstrate the possibilities for using the methods of practical theology in this and future studies.

1.7 Reflexivity – position statement of the researcher

Qualitative research is done as a social process, recognizing that objectivity is not possible and that the methods, researcher, participants, data, and the interpretation of data are all connected in complicated ways (Denzin and Lincoln 1998a, 23). In terms of how best to understand the situation, qualitative research evaluates the subjective data, using smaller samples to illustrate particular causations and meanings. The qualitative researcher must be cautious in using examples to generalize; however, understandings derived from the research can provide valuable insights that shed a different light than quantitative results or by using questions not measured by numerically data-driven research (Swinton and Mowat 2006, 46–49). The researcher must critically reflect on his own positionality and their relationship to the participants. The context of the data generation may influence the data itself. Reflexivity requires an iterative process of considering these factors based on the acknowledgement that all knowledge is incomplete and contingent.

My interest in this topic comes from several sources that are important to me personally and professionally. As an instructor in the Computer Information Systems Department of a business college in a large public university, I am involved with young adults on a regular basis and have observed how their use of technology has evolved in recent years. The increased use of computers has led to a corresponding increase in the role of technology in their lives. But recognition of how they are influencing the development of technologies as well as how they are being shaped by their use of and reliance on digital devices does not seem to be apparent to them. This became more obvious and important to me through my involvement with young adult Christians in teaching, fellowship activities, and mission projects at a Presbyterian church where I have been a longtime active member. As a mother, I had further significant opportunities to observe and interact with a number of young people as they progressed through their own developmental stages at the same time that computer technology was becoming more and more available for personal applications. My perceptions of the effects of the technology changes and adoption by young adults were influenced by my own experiences

and perspective as a member of another generation, specifically the generation labelled 'baby-boomers'. An article by Susan Herring addresses this issue and will be cited within the context of the discussion.

Interest in young adults' technology use in relation to their theology was heightened during my participation in the 'Bible and the Contemporary World' postgraduate distance learning programme at the University of St Andrews. It was during this time of study that I began reflecting on what appeared to me to be a lack of recognition of a connection between what had become everyday technology habits of young adult Christians and their theological considerations. The use of technology, particularly in social media, was becoming nearly ubiquitous in the facilitation of communication in relationships for the young adults I encountered. Relationships are central to the Christian faith, the vehicle through which faith is most commonly realized and enacted. Thus, if young adult Christians are using technology such as text-messaging and Facebook in their practices of friendship, those practices should be connected to and reflected on in relation to their theological understandings, particularly their theological understandings of friendship. My dissertation for the MLitt employed methods of practical theology to consider the use of text-messaging with students involved in a college ministry programme. This PhD thesis project is a continuation of my interest in the development of young adult Christians by involving them in a study that heightens awareness of the inherent connection between a profession of faith and everyday activities. Focusing on Facebook and friendship provided a subject of interest and importance to young adults that they were eager to discuss while offering a model for theological reflection that can be applied to other areas of Christian life.

The role of the researcher and the participant are unequal. But the participants are active agents in this research study. In choosing to participate and provide data, they had a visible role in changing and creating the structure of the project. The collaborative approach taken to this project, through the interviews, follow-up emails, Facebook connections, and validation input, was an intentional attempt to encourage reflexivity of the participants, as well as of the researcher. In this way, the iterative aspect of practical theology can flourish beyond the research project itself. That this succeeded was confirmed by several instances occurring more than a year after the initial interviews when participants indicated to the researcher that they continued to think about the topics discussed and make efforts to be more conscious of the impact of their Facebook practices.

The primary source data provided by the participants was analysed with the use of a variety of materials, including texts, journals, posts appearing only on-line, and the results of other research studies. In examining texts for inclusion in this study, effort was made to ensure the authenticity, credibility, applicability, and meaning of the sources. At the same time, it was important to remain aware that authors, as well as the researcher, inherently have their own perspectives, biases, and agendas. Sources should be critically evaluated both in terms of what is being made known and what is not included. Because significant parts of the theological perspectives on friendship were studied prior to doing the fieldwork, the researcher acknowledges the effects of those perspectives on the questions, coding and analysis. For instance, familiarity with Aristotle's system of ethics and Aelred's labeling of types of friendships led to correlation with the participants' discussion of their friendship practices. Similarly, awareness of theories of the effects of technology and consumerism likely caused the researcher to look for evidence of the effects of these contexts in the practices of the participants. In other instances, my own traditional theological understandings may have caused me to dismiss theories that I did not think would be relevant or familiar to the understandings of the participants. Examples of this are the feminist and queer theologies. However on further reflection over the course of the project, it became clear to me that these voices had important perspectives that challenged the patriarchal or hierarchical structure of the church that the young people are likely to have taken for granted. In additional analysis of the structure of the fieldwork models, evidence of alternative conceptualizations of friendship emerged. Two of the models demonstrate structured analysis of friendship, while the other two models represent consideration of more relational aspects of friendship. Deciding to include alternative perspectives in the theological reflection demonstrated my own reflexivity resulting from insight gained through analysis of the participants' expressions of their ways of thinking.

The researcher acknowledges that there are other popular means of communicating using social media and recognizes that new ones will continue to be developed which are likely to eclipse or replace the current prevalence of Facebook. The research is aimed at utilizing methods of practical theology with young adult Christians in their contemporary methods of engaging in an enduring practice of friendship. Facebook itself serves as a vehicle to explore a particular practice in order to encourage theological reflection on other practices in the lives of Christians seeking to know and faithfully serve God. The outcome of revised practice is not intended to be limited or specific to Facebook-friendship practices but rather to serve as a

springboard for continuing reflection and practices that are consistent with Christian discipleship.

1.8 Conventions used in this study

Facebook-friends – When the word ‘friend’ is used in a categorical manner, specifically for persons identified primarily as friends through Facebook, the hyphenated phrase ‘Facebook-friend’ is the designated convention (quotation marks not included for in-text usage).

Capitalization of terms from models – The names of the models and terms used in the sense of their relation to the models are capitalized to distinguish from when the same words are used in the context of normal usage. For example Acquaintance, Social Friend, Close Friend, and Intimate refer to the category or persons described in the discussions relating to the Categories of Friends model. Similarly, titles used to describe a type will be capitalized. This includes descriptions such as Spiritual Friends, Carnal Friend, Worldly Friend, as defined by Aelred. In quotations from the fieldwork or discussions of particular relationships, the word ‘friend’ is not capitalized.

1.9 Documentation

Copies of University of St. Andrews, University Teaching and Research Committee Approvals are provided in the Appendix.

Chapter 2. Experience – Facebook Practices: Embodying Assumptions and Values

Chapter Argument: Young adult Christians embody their assumptions and values in their Facebook friendship practices.

Chapter Introduction

Using the terminology of Swinton and Mowat’s framework, the data from the fieldwork describing Facebook friendship practices provides the ‘experience’ for this study. The focus of this chapter is exploring the experience. Attending to the descriptions of young adult Christians’ friendship practices leads to identifying the assumptions and values that appear to be important to them. Their accounts, although not using specifically theological vocabulary, are listened to for hints or fragments of their theological values. In addition to their verbal explanations, Facebook posts of young adult Christians are included in the analysis as they, too, reveal assumptions and values that may suggest theological understandings. Four models developed from the data are used to make the argument that young adult Christians embody their assumptions and values in their Facebook friendship practices. The models developed from the experience will then structure the situational and theological analyses to consider practices of Facebook, friendship and faith using methods of practical theology.

TABLE 2.1.

Aspects of practising Facebook-friendship	Experience issues	Model	Embodied assumptions and values
‘It would be nice to stay in touch’	Past and current associations	Categories of Friends	Making friends is important
‘Friendship gets to be tricky’	Facebook serves different purposes	Levels of Friendship	Realizing value in all relationships
‘Ropin’ ‘em in for Jesus’	Ways of communicating	Types of Posts	Sharing is essential to friendship
‘Christian T-shirts’	Disclosure and interpretation	Posting Frequency and Disclosure	Message and meaning are conveyed through friendship

Table 2.1 introduces the models in terms of aspects of friendship that were identified by the participants. In expressing that ‘it would be nice to stay in touch’, young adult Christians

described their motivation for and interest in maintaining Facebook-friendships with both past and current friends. Friendships developed from a variety of categories of acquaintance embody assumptions and values for the importance of making friends. Participants also admitted that ‘friendship gets to be tricky’ which recognizes the value in each relationship but uses Facebook to serve different purposes at different levels of friendship. While not necessarily ‘wearing a ‘Christian T-shirt’, message and meaning are conveyed through friendship, including practices on Facebook related to posting frequency and disclosure. Likewise, through the various types of posts utilized in communicating with friends on Facebook, young adult Christians affirm that sharing is essential to friendship but may not be aimed at ‘ropin’ ‘em in for Jesus’ on Facebook. In this chapter, the participants’ voices will be heard as they hint at assumptions and values embodied within their Facebook practices of friendship.

2.1 Categories of friends: ‘It would be nice to stay in touch’

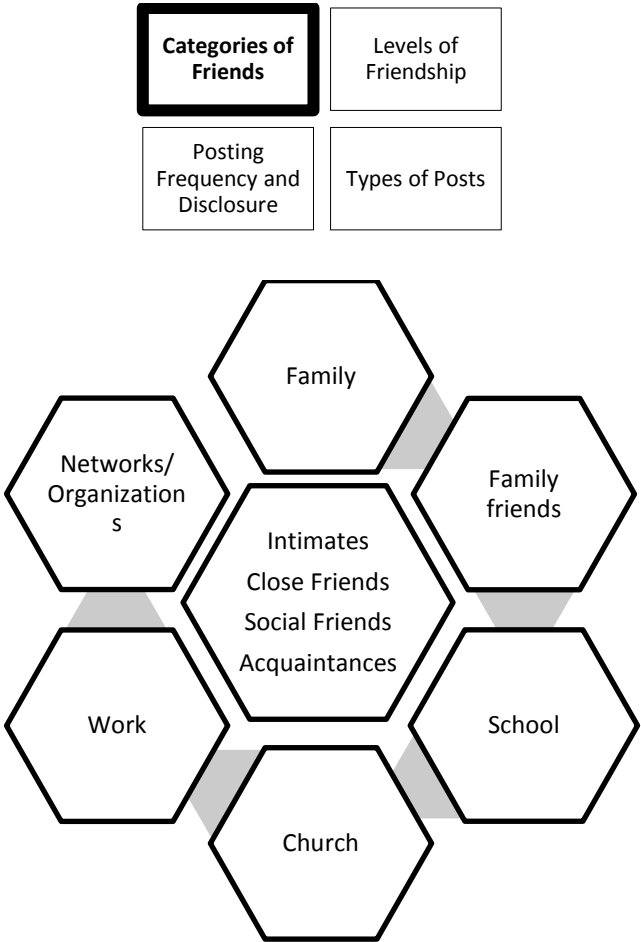


FIGURE 2.1. Categories of Friends model

During the course of the interviews the participants often referred to groups of friends or specific friends based on how they first met. The model in Figure 2.1 identifies each context of association as a category in an order in which an individual may first be introduced to the category. At the centre of the category wheel are the levels of friendship that could be applicable to individual relationships within any of the categories. These levels (Acquaintance, Social Friend, Close Friend, and Intimate) are identified and discussed in the next model but will be referred to as they relate to the different categories of friends in this model.

2.1.1 *Family and family friends*

Participants in the study referred to Facebook-friend connections with family members including parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. Mothers were the most common family member mentioned in relation to a Facebook-friend connection. The Facebook-friend connection between parents and young adults reveals different attitudes about the relationship and is handled in a variety of ways by the respondents in the study. For some of the participants, having parents as Facebook-friends is viewed as helpful, providing a convenient way to keep them informed and eliminate the need to check in with them as often. Several people gave a similar response to the one expressed by Fran, living away from family at university. Referring to her Facebook presence, she simply explained, 'I have it up there for my family to keep up on my life.' However, some respondents said they did not like it that parents were even on Facebook, much less that they were expected to be Facebook-friends and provide access to their photos and interactions with peers. A few people said that they would not accept a friend request from their parents; others accepted a friend request from a parent then later deleted the connection. No participant indicated that a Facebook-friend connection with a parent was a condition imposed by their parent.

Drew, Hannah and Brent, all in separate interviews, related incidents of their photos on Facebook being viewed by their own family members or by the parents of their romantic partner. In each case, they felt that the person viewing the photos had formed an inaccurate impression of them or their friends based on what they had seen on Facebook and they took actions to correct the impression, either by clarifying the misinterpretation through additional Facebook posts, verbal contact, or in one case, deleting their own Facebook account to prevent further misunderstandings.

Erin discussed enjoying conducting asynchronous discussions with her brother on Facebook, particularly when living at distance that made most other means of contact with him difficult. She said she was more likely to respond to a wall post made by her brother than posts made by other Facebook-friends. Sarah told of a situation where someone had responded with negative comments to something her sister had posted on Facebook. She quickly reacted by calling her sister to offer comfort and support. Fran and Claire discussed feeling a responsibility to serve as a positive role model for their younger sisters and friends of their sisters. They said they were mindful that younger girls were viewing their Facebook pages. No specific details emerged from the initial fieldwork related to Facebook interactions with other levels of family members such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, or cousins, other than anecdotal mention of Facebook connections.

Another category of people with whom a young adult Christian is likely to have Facebook-friends are family friends. Family friends may include adults who are friends of parents as well as younger family connections. Justin spoke of a close family friend that is 'like a second mother'. He told of his caution to keep from hurting her feelings by refraining from making the snide comments he typically enjoys posting in response to the posts of other Facebook-friends. Justin's demonstration of a protective relationship with the older female family friend is evidence of relationship that is more than an Acquaintance and that of a Close Friend. Fran and Claire, both Facebook-friends with friends of their younger sisters, are careful not to make posts on their Facebook pages that Claire described as requiring a 'level of maturity to understand.' Although merely Acquaintances of their sisters' friends, they are conscious of the exposure to their own lives that the Facebook-friend relationship provides to the younger girls.

Without using formal theological language, young adult Christians embody assumptions and values of respect, integrity, responsibility, and care in their interactions regarding Facebook-friendships with family members and family friends. The willingness to maintain family members and family friends as Facebook-friends indicates their considerations of honesty, transparency, and accountability in decisions regarding their uses of Facebook. The participants who allow family members access to their Facebook pages are secure in their relationships and the activities presented about them on Facebook. Although some young adults may say that they do not care what family and family friends think about what they see on Facebook posts, that was not the attitude conveyed by any of the participants in this research. The attentiveness they pay to either having or not having parents as Facebook-

friends indicates special regard for the parental relationship. Responsibility as a role model is accepted, even when not sought, and evidence of consideration and care towards others is expressed. Those who do not allow family members to be Facebook-friends make an honest choice not to open up all aspects of their lives to family members, indicating their preference for privacy or a distinction between communications with family or friends. Young adult Christians embody values of regard for family relationships that differentiate them from other friend or peer relationships. Facebook-friendships with family members are important and came up naturally in the interviews but this category of Facebook-friendships is not the focus of this research, concerning instead practices of Facebook, friendship and faith among peers.

2.1.2 School and church friends

Some friendships form from an early age and remain significant for a lifetime even though circumstances occur that affect the proximity or frequency of contact. Exposure to new groups of people while progressing through school and church activities provides opportunities to make acquaintances and form friendships. The school and church category of friends is likely to be the largest category for a young adult Christian at this stage in their life. For current students and those actively involved in church or faith-related organizations, connections with people they know through those activities are their naturally most frequent contacts. Facebook-friends associated from school or church include the full range of levels of friendship identified in the Levels of Friendship model: Acquaintances, Social Friends, Close Friends and Intimates.

A large number of Facebook-friend connections related to school may come about through activities planned specifically for the purpose of meeting new people. Openly announced events are commonly held at the beginning of university terms with the intention of introducing new students to a large number of people as part of their orientation. Several participants noted that, in making these connections as Facebook-friends, there may be interest and intention for further development in the relationship. Trent explained, 'I don't really know them yet but it might be a way to get to know them. We have an affiliation and a friendship may develop.' But according to the respondents, many of the Facebook-friend connections made after only an initial contact in a school or church environment do not develop any further and these connections are considered Acquaintances.

Most of the participants in the study said that the main reason they are on Facebook is to keep up with what is going on in the lives of people they know. This includes relationships that originated from school or church but with persons whom they do not see or communicate with on a regular basis except through Facebook. In many cases, respondents' comments indicated that they are still interested retaining a connection with former schoolmates and old friends, despite limited opportunities for personal interaction.

Rob: I have a group for friends from home, high school, suitemates, hall, church group. I went to two different undergrad schools so I have lots of friends from the earlier schools that I haven't kept in contact with... If they were close enough at the time, I will keep them [on my Facebook-friend list] to potentially get in contact with.

Jared: For our fraternity alum group, it's a way of communicating. It's also good for events, letting people know what's going on.

A few respondents acknowledged that a connection existed as a result of a past association but trying to maintain a relationship was artificial. Hannah admitted that through Facebook:

You can contact them but sometimes I wonder what is the point of contacting someone I haven't talked to in a million years?

As progression is made through schools and changes are made in churches or activities attended, relationships with friends and acquaintances from prior schools and churches may naturally become less active as new friends and acquaintances are seen more frequently. In discussing Facebook-friends from the categories of School and Church, young adult Christians provide hints of their assumptions and values, including interest in others and openness to future possibilities for further development of relationships. They place importance on knowing and staying connected with others in their peer groups even as their situations change.

2.1.3 Organizations, work, and networks

The final categories of association in evidence from conversations in the initial fieldwork include friendships originating from organizations, work or networks. This category includes people that they have met but also includes others who may not be personally known but with whom there is an association because of a mutual connection to an organization, job, or

‘friends of friends’. Because of the life stage of the participants in the study, there may be less involvement with others from these categories than in the other categories identified.

Several respondents mentioned Facebook-friends that they knew through their jobs. Co-workers primarily appear to be at the level of Acquaintances or Social Friends, although they may have frequent interaction. Because the interaction is a condition of a job requirement, it is not the result of a choice and may not be a preference. Molly noted a need for caution in relation to Facebook posts made available to people she knew through work:

I have a lot of people [on Facebook] I work with so I’m careful. I would never say anything negative about my uni or lectures on Facebook.

Molly also described the importance to her of the convenience of having all her connections in one social network, but that there was a difference in what she wanted to communicate with Facebook-friends from different categories.

Expressing similar concerns, Lauren suggested using more than one Facebook account or a Google+ account as a way to keep people from work separate from other friends:

I’m very careful about what I post in public. I don’t add people that I interact with or know professionally, like professors, pastors. Even stuff that isn’t necessarily inappropriate, you don’t need to add to that relationship. I don’t like everyone knowing what I’m doing all the time... It’s a good idea to have two accounts for different spheres.

Other participants said that they felt that it would not be worth the trouble to have separate accounts. Brent was using Facebook-friend connections to network for jobs and saw a benefit to having a lot of different categories and levels of friendship available in one place.

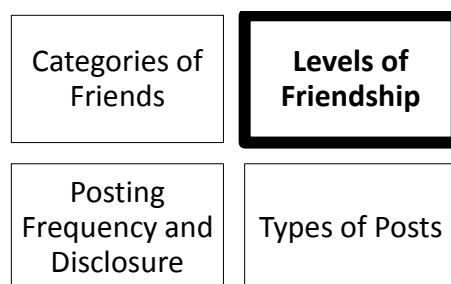
Thus although there were examples of friendships from a category such as work, organizations, or networks developing into a Social, Close or Intimate relationship, conversations from the fieldwork indicated that at this stage in the participants lives, friendships from this category are primarily at the level of Acquaintance. The participants indicate their value for the importance of being open to others and the possibilities for relationships with people from a variety of sources in their lives. They also express understanding of a need for limits, caution, and discretion, when becoming involved with

others. Such an approach allows them to be gracious to all yet guarding themselves and those closest to them through discretion in posting on Facebook.

2.1.4 Categories of Friends model summary

Chase described his practice of adding someone as a friend on Facebook as based on, ‘... if I think it would be nice to stay in touch with that person.’ Thus, family members, old friends, current peers, co-workers – different categories and levels of friendship, originating in a variety of ways, are conveniently connected by a digital social networking site. The young adult Christians participating in the study identify friends by various categories in relation to the origin or the current context of their relationship. Within each category of friendship connection on Facebook, relationships exist or are possible at each of the levels of closeness identified in a model depicting Levels of Friendship: Acquaintance, Social Friend, Close Friend, and Intimate. In listening for assumptions and values embodied in explanations from young adult Christians discussing their friendship practices through Facebook, several characteristics are heard. They express their appreciation for relationships and connection, the importance of honesty, an assumption of responsibility as role models, genuine care for friends from every category, and optimism for further development of relationships. Although these assumptions and values were not expressed in theological terms or as explicitly resulting from their faith, their identification of themselves as Christians and the context of the discussion implied that their responses were descriptive of their faith-based beliefs.

2.2 Levels of friendship: ‘Friendship gets to be tricky’



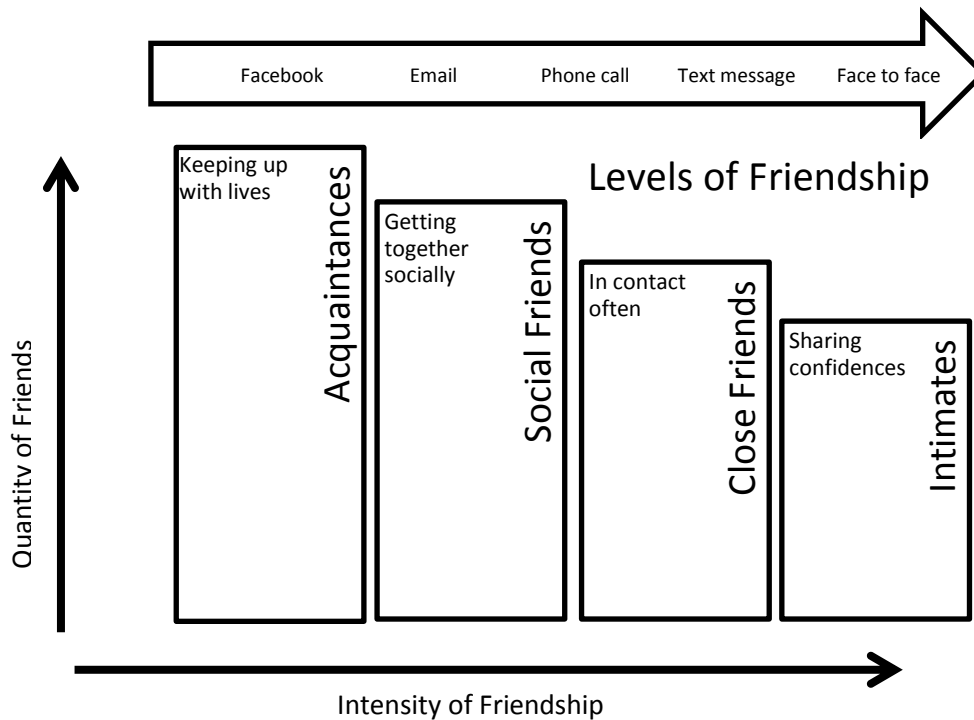


FIGURE 2.2. Levels of Friendship model

While the Categories of Friends model identified origins or contexts for friendship, the depth of relationships and means of communication among friends vary. These dimensions are described in four general levels in the Levels of Friendship model: Acquaintances, Social Friends, Close Friends and Intimates. As the plotting along the horizontal and vertical axis in Figure 2.2 indicates, an inverse relationship is expected between the number of friends in a category and the level of intensity in the relationship.⁹ That is, a person may have many Acquaintances listed as friends on Facebook but the amount of interaction and intimacy of the relationship is much less than that with friends in the other levels of friendship. At the further end of the model are Intimate friendships, including romantic partners and family members, which are likely to be few in number but deeply important. In between these classifications, are groups of Close Friends and Social Friends with whom various types of interaction other than Facebook occur. These levels of friendship are considered as hints of assumptions and values listened for in the participants' descriptions of how Facebook and other methods are used to communicate based on their relationship to a friend and the content of the communication.

⁹ The relative size of the bars in the chart do not represent quantitative comparisons between the levels. The study did not include a quantitative analysis of numbers of Facebook-friends by level or category.

Social networking sites are frequently utilized for communicating with Facebook-friends from all categories. Other ways of communicating continue to provide important means for connecting and are favoured depending on the purpose of the communication and the type of friendship. Jared summarized his Facebook use in relation to the level of friendship in the following way:

I think of Facebook contact as different for different levels of friendship. If you are really close with someone you will meet up with them; if you are a little bit less close, you will call them; a little bit less, you will text them; then a little bit farther down, you will Facebook them.

Jared indicates his understanding that discernment of different in ways of being a friend is important and calls for an appropriate response.

2.2.1 Facebook use with Acquaintances

Being able to keep up with what Acquaintances are doing was the most frequently cited advantage of being on Facebook for the study participants. The Facebook connection is also cited as a convenient way to stay in contact with people who are not living in close proximity or who are in different time zones: situations which make it difficult to have a real-time conversation. Typical explanations of how participants use Facebook with Acquaintances included:

Anne: Since I'm not from the UK and I have friends all over the world, I use Facebook to see what they are up to, to keep up with people I'm not that close to.

Many Facebook-friend connections are also in place between people who were acquainted or had a friend relationship in the past but with whom the basis for the relationship has changed or with whom they are no longer in close proximity. With these Acquaintances, there is little or no communication by any other means than Facebook. Facebook provides a way to conveniently maintain a connection between Acquaintances and keep up with each other's lives to whatever extent that information is made available on Facebook and is viewed by an interested party.

Carl: I have a lot of people that I know from where I lived before and I use Facebook to keep in contact. It's not our sole means of contact but it's almost like an email system to say, 'Hey, this is what happened today'. Because for them I know they are not going

to check their email and I'm not going to check my email and you just don't always have time to make that phone call.

Some respondents made comments expressing their belief that without the social network, a connection between acquaintances would not be sustained.

Blake: I don't use Facebook at all for local connections. I don't like that I have to use it but what I use it for is that I have a lot of friends, best friends, all over the world so if I didn't use Facebook I couldn't stay in touch.

However, in several instances in the conversations regarding former friends or Acquaintances that had contacted participants with Friend requests, frustration was revealed by the expectation that invitations to become a Facebook-friend would be confirmed.

Hannah: I have people on my list who aren't necessarily my friends. ... It's ridiculous, really. Once someone asks you, you don't want to be rude.

Hannah admits that she does not consider some of the people on her Facebook-friends list as friends and her desire to not be rude may be a matter of etiquette. But she may also be hinting at a value she places on individuals, their feelings, and relationships, and a willingness to be connected to them, at least digitally, regardless of the current proximity or circumstances of association. However, her wording makes clear that she distinguishes these connections from what she considers as actual friendships.

Adding new Acquaintances as friends on Facebook is the common and accepted means of exchanging information in order to be able to get in touch. Participants said that it is easier and feels less intrusive to find someone on Facebook and make a Friend request than asking for a telephone number, email, or physical address. They recognize that making a connection with a new Acquaintance through one's Facebook account will provide not only contact information but access to many other more personal types of information. They are willing to offer this type of access to their own information in exchange for the opportunity to learn more about the other person, based on what is posted on the new friend's Facebook page. As Megan explained:

First year [at university] you added every person you met. It would have been awkward not to.

Participants agreed that they added more people as Facebook-friends than they actually developed friendships with so most of the connections remain at the level of Acquaintance.

Acquaintances may also be people who are not necessarily at a distance in time or space but with whom a connection exists through the category of network, organization, work or an assigned project.

Rob: There are some people who I am in group projects with that I don't want to see or meet with so I'll just use Facebook to communicate.

An algorithm in the Facebook software generates recommendations of people to make a friend request to based on mutual friends or other commonalities as indicated by interests, organizations, or preferences. Participants said that they had made friend requests to people they already knew based on a Facebook recommendation but did not make requests to strangers recommended by Facebook. It is common among the participants, however, to follow-up on a Facebook-friend suggestion made through Facebook of someone they do not know if the person is suggested by one of their own Facebook-friends. Although the notion of being Facebook-friends with people who were friends of friends seemed to be accepted as common, the respondents in the study who mentioned receiving a friend request from someone they did not know but who had mutual friends said they would not necessarily respond positively to the request.

Lindsey: If someone adds you and you see that that you have 39 mutual friends you think you should be friends but maybe not. I would have to know them.

Connection to and communication with Facebook-friends that are Acquaintances are conveniently facilitated using Facebook and in many cases serves as the only point of connection or means of communication at this level of friendship. Young adult Christian practices embody value for friendship, both for old friends and in the possibilities for friendship with new Acquaintances. This is demonstrated by retention of connections to those they are no longer in close contact with and the consideration that they take in issuing, accepting, and maintaining Facebook-friend invitations.

2.2.2 Facebook use with Social Friends

A level of friendship relationships that includes people with whom contact occurs with some regularity or socially is labelled in the model as Social Friends. This type of relationship was

identified in the interviews as the participants described people in whom they are interested, feel a personal connection to, and have occasional to regular contact. With these friends they are more likely to use email, phone calls, or texts than they do with Acquaintances but they are also using Facebook for activities such as reading and responding to their posts, making arrangements to meet, issuing greetings or invitations and sharing photos. Several participants spoke of using Facebook to send invitations or plan social events. This example of an invitation from Cara was posted on Facebook:

I cordially invite you to attend a vocal recital of popular arias, art songs, operetta, spirituals, and maybe even a little bit of musical theatre performed by yours truly. Throughout the years I have been truly blessed to have so many wonderful people who have mentored, nurtured, and guided me along the way. This performance is for you!

Checking or posting a brief message on the Facebook Wall of Facebook-friends that the participants care about but do not normally see or hear from on a regular basis was mentioned as a common practice.

Chase: If I haven't heard from someone or get the sense something is wrong, I can use Facebook to check on them.

Lauren: I may not have time but I'll try to at least get on every day to check birthdays and if it's someone I care about or have been friends with, they'll get a shout out.

There are features on Facebook that allow for organizing Facebook-friends by groups or interests. Some of the participants said that creating groups provides a way to organize their Facebook-friend list so that they can better keep up with certain friends and be more intentional in whose posts they read and who sees their posts.

Fran: I have one (group) for friends from home, high school, suitemates, hall, church group. I'll get notifications when someone in the group posts something so I can check it if I want.

Brent: I definitely use lists. I can post depending on who would better understand what I am talking about at the moment. For example, I won't ask my grandmother her opinion of a rap group. My groups are a mixture based on how people understand me and my interests.

In discussing how Facebook is used with Social Friends, young adult Christians value the convenience it provides. They discern the needs of friendship at different levels of closeness and can be intentional in staying in contact and exercising discretion in their communications. In describing how they practise friendship through Facebook with their Social Friends, they reveal fragments of their assumptions and values for care and consideration towards others with whom they are in regular contact.

2.2.3 Facebook use with Close Friends and Intimates

The young adult Christians in the study talked about their Close Friends as people they are in touch with often, sometimes even multiple times a day, usually by phone, text or meeting up with in person. Close Friends may also be people who share a close bond but with whom regular contact is not possible, however the relationship is such that it is not diminished by distance or time between communications. Several respondents commented that they did not need to use Facebook to see how their Close Friends were doing because they already knew through communicating via other means. Facebook interaction with these friends is not as important for seeing how or what they are doing as it is for sharing photos or links to sites that are of mutual interest. With Close Friends, there is an expectation that important information will be shared personally before it is announced on Facebook.

Rob: A lot of times for my closer friends, Facebook contact is pretty rare but more along the lines of they will post a video or something, sharing a website.

Carl: If it's big news, I'll probably get a call first from a close friend. Marriage, babies.

Clear distinctions between the Close Friend and Intimate levels of friendship of the model in relation to Facebook-friendship practices with friends are difficult to make. As best as could be determined from the participants' comments in the study, the use of Facebook with Intimate friends is the same as in the Close Friend level of friendship. At both of these more intense levels of friendship, young adult Christians are clear that some relationships are too important to them to rely only on Facebook for communication or interaction. Since Intimate relationships are outside the parameters of the friendship relationships considered in the study, no questions were specifically asked about using Facebook for communication with a 'significant other' in a romantic relationship and none of the participants volunteered information about how they used it in that context. Since family friendships are also outside

the scope of this study, their interactions via social networks will not be explored in this model.

2.2.4 Levels of Friendship model summary

Facebook is a convenient means of being connected at all levels of friendship. Participants in the study were clear in expressing that as the level of friendship increased, means of connecting in addition to Facebook are more frequently utilized. Although a face-to-face meeting most likely occurred between two people connected through Facebook at some point, Facebook is possibly the only method of connection or means of communication between Acquaintances. Facebook-friendship with Acquaintances however embody assumptions and values that demonstrate regard for others, old friendships, and the possibilities for new relationships. Unlike in relationships with Acquaintances where Facebook may be the only point of connection, in friendships that are currently closer Facebook serves primarily as a convenience. It facilitates communication for specific purposes or sharing photos and links of mutual interest. Social Friends will probably see each other at events and may use email or group text messages in addition to Facebook to communicate and share information. Close Friends may be in contact more often, seeing each other or using phone calls and personal text messages. Some Close Friends may be separated by space or time but a connection exists that is strong enough that the distance or passing of time does not dissolve the friendship. Participants stated that they appreciate being able to maintain a feeling of connection with Close Friends that they do not see often through the exchange of Facebook messages and photos of events in each other's lives. Intimate friends are in regular contact by means other than Facebook. Facebook is not needed for the exchange of information with an Intimate friend but may be useful as a convenient messaging service on mobile devices as well as for sharing photos.

In discussing how Facebook is used at different levels of friendship, assumptions and values of young adult Christians are embodied in their regard for friends and their openness to new relationships. At every level of relationship, there is consideration of persistence in friendship as they discern the most appropriate means of maintaining connection. As Brent commented: Friendship gets to be tricky.

2.3 Posting Frequency and Disclosure: Wearing a Christian T-shirt

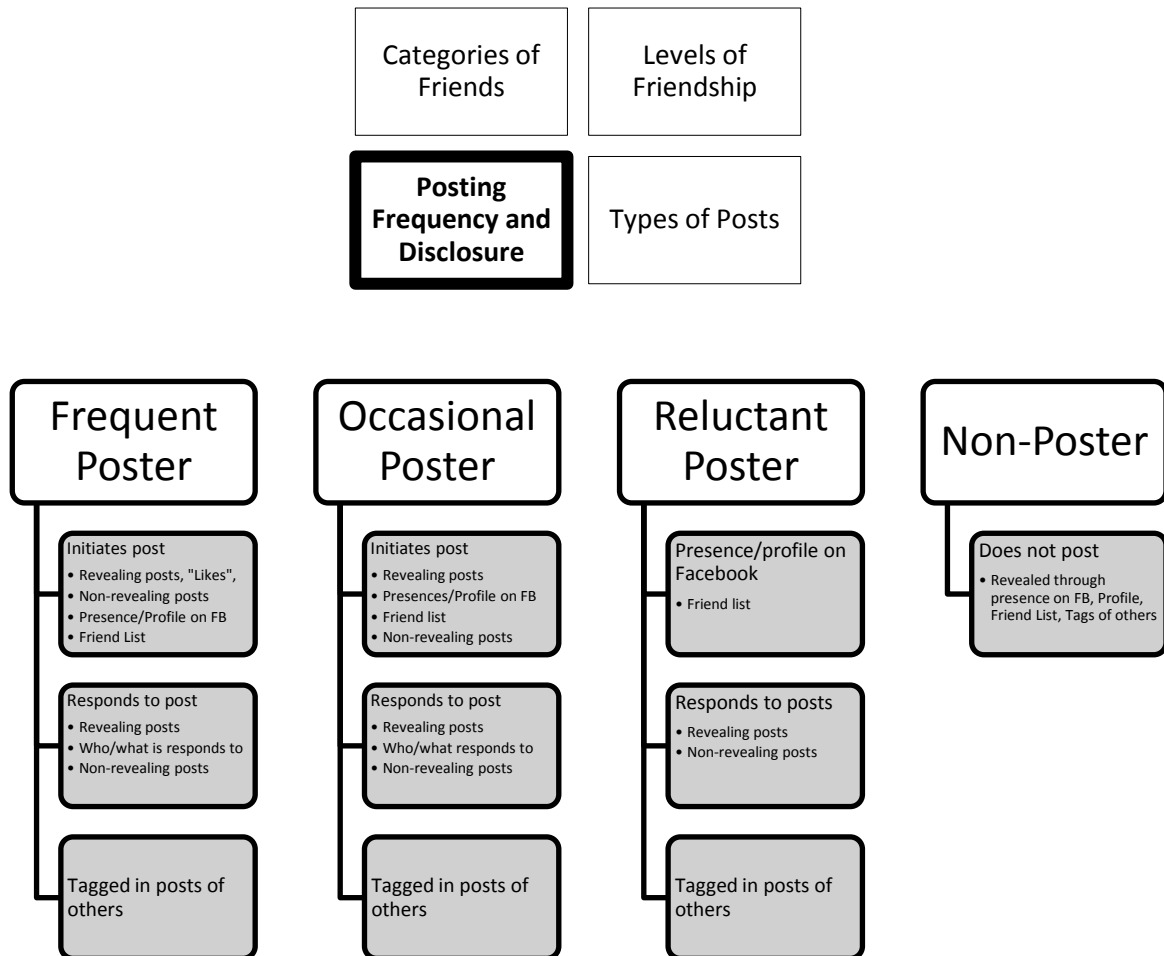


FIGURE 2.3. Posting Frequency and Disclosure model

The research indicated that posting activity varies by individual users on Facebook, illustrated in Figure 2.3. In this model, four types of behaviour are delineated ranging from Non-Poster to Frequent Poster. In between the extreme designations are levels identified as Reluctant Poster and Occasional Poster. Facebook users will take an action on Facebook that is visible to others either by initiating a post themselves or by responding to a post previously made. Every activity is an opportunity for an interaction with another or the multiple others who are linked by a Facebook-friend connection.

As will be described in the next section with the Types of Posts model, posting activity can appear in a variety of formats including text, photos, pictures, and links. What someone posts and/or responds to can be revealing about the person making the post. How often a person posts may have a bearing on how much or what a person is disclosing about themselves and

could relate to an individual's personality. Information about a person is revealed, interpreted and discerned in various ways that involve both the individual posting on Facebook and the Facebook-friend viewing the post.

Although it might be presumed that a person who posts more frequently is revealing more about themselves, that was not the observation of some of the participants. For example, Molly mentioned that although her friend Hannah is a frequent poster, she felt that the content of her posts were impersonal and non-revealing. In this model narrative, we'll look at what participants discussed about themselves and others posting at different levels and what may be revealed and not revealed through Facebook-posting behaviour at the different levels.

The posting activity of approximately 50 young adult Christians was observed for one week in June 2012 and November 2013. The following statistics were documented for that time period.

Level of Posting	June 2012	November 2013
Frequent – ave. 1/day or more	7 (15%)	6 (13%)
Occasional – 2 to 6 posts in week observed	19 (40%)	16 (34%)
Reluctant – 1 post in period observed	10 (21%)	13 (28%)
Non-poster	11 (23%)	12 (25%)

The activity level of the young adults may vary according to the time of year or types of activities in which a Facebook user is currently involved. For example, a couple of the people observed were taking vacations and posting about special activities during the week. Others on vacation may not post at all for a period of time due to the change in their routine, a conscious decision to include abstaining from using Facebook as part of a vacation, or limited access to technology required for posting. Academic topics and sporting events were mentioned more during the week in November as current events of interest during that season. The number of participants listed as Non-Posters is invalid because individuals may not have posted during the specific week under observation but many of them were observed to post at other times.

2.3.1 Non-Poster. A person who does not initiate or respond to posts on Facebook may be revealing a dislike for or discomfort with public disclosure of their personal thoughts, activities, or information. Yet, even though a person does not post on Facebook, information about a

person with a Facebook account is revealed. The presence of a Facebook account and acceptance or issuance of friend requests reveals who one knows and an interest in seeing what other people are doing or what they are posting on Facebook. Non-posting behaviour may be associated with particular personality types and such an analysis could more fully or appropriately be developed in another type of study. Participants did not think it was unusual for someone to have a Facebook account yet to be a non-poster. Several people mentioned that they had friends who had set up Facebook accounts but did not actively use them. Chase explained this practice and his understanding of this behaviour:

Some people are hardly ever on-line so they don't actively use it. I understand quite a lot why someone wouldn't want to. ... In a way, [not being on Facebook] it gives you freedom, space.

Perhaps a more common practice described by the participants is that of people who do not actively participate on Facebook by posting but are nonetheless active in checking their Facebook account to view the posts of others and keep up with invitations and announcements. Carl explained he uses Facebook in this way:

I use it to see who is pregnant, getting married, breaking up, dramatic things.

In addition to inferences that can be made from non-posting behaviour, information about non-posters may be revealed through information provided when initially creating a profile upon joining Facebook and also by photos or posts added by others that are tagged¹⁰ with their name. There is an option to remove a tag placed by someone else which might be a feature utilized by non-posters who do not want their name to be visible on a post made by another person. Although Anne is not a Non-poster, she described her understanding of and response to this feature:

I'm glad you have an option that you can keep people from tagging you and putting up bad pictures you don't want on the internet. It's better to get a choice [before they post it] instead of just being able to remove the tag. I read how Google associated faces from tags and it freaked me out. I want to control what people see of me. Now you have the option where you get to approve things before the tag goes on.

¹⁰ A tag can be attached to a photo or post to associate or identify a Facebook user as having a connection to the posted item.

The term 'Facebook stalking' was used several times during interviews. Its meaning was commonly understood by the young adult Christians. Derek, a participant in a focus group, described the practice with an example of his own behaviour:

I'll Facebook stalk a lot, I admit it. But I will go on to see what people have been doing, especially friends that I don't see every day. ... So I'll just Facebook and spy on them a while, see their pictures, what they've been doing.

A Non-poster does not reveal content about his thoughts or opinions through posts but in addition to profile information, friend lists, and tags to the posts of Facebook friends, information about the Non-poster may be revealed through the content of other people's posts to him, including invitations, and the refusal to respond through Facebook.

2.3.2 Reluctant Poster. Although some Facebook users may claim or appear to be Non-posters, some of them may actually be more accurately identified as either Reluctant or Occasional Posters. These category labels were not specifically enunciated by the participants but they are descriptive of posting behaviours they discussed. Reluctant Posters may consider themselves to be Non-posters because they do not initiate posts but they do respond through Facebook to posts directed to them or invitations.

Mark sat in on the research discussion with his college fellowship group. During the questions and general conversation, he did not make any comment. After the group discussion had ended, he spoke to the researcher and apologized for not contributing although he was really interested in what the others had to say about how they used Facebook. He said he is on Facebook but very rarely posts anything other than responses to attending events or posts made directly to him. He did not feel he had anything to contribute to the focus group discussion because his Facebook participation was so limited. Yet his interest in the comments of others indicates that Non- or Reluctant Posters are still engaged in Facebook-friendship practices, although their own participation may appear to be limited.

A few people that are on Facebook said that they would prefer not to have a Facebook account but continued having one because it was the best way of staying connected. Lindsey explained that she thought it was

... more and more difficult not to be on and still be included in invitations and what is going on.

A Reluctant Poster probably does not reveal content about thoughts or opinions through posts. In addition to profile information, friend lists, and tags to the posts of Facebook friends, information about the reluctant poster may be revealed through the content of other people's posts to him, including invitations and responses.

2.3.3 Occasional Poster. An Occasional Poster is more likely to initiate a post than the reluctant poster, as well as respond to the text or photo posts of others. An example of an Occasional Poster is someone who posts or 'Likes'¹¹ photos of events or activities in which they have participated. If the photos include images of other friends who were involved in the activity, the photos are likely to be tagged with the names of other participants and a notification will be sent to the people tagged. The photo will appear on the newsfeed of Facebook-friends of the people tagged, offering an opportunity for Facebook-friends to comment or 'Like' it. People can also add their own name or that of other Facebook-friends to photos posted by others.

The Occasional Poster engages with others by reacting and receiving reactions to posts. Lindsey described pleasure in both anticipating and interacting with others through occasional posting:

I spend time looking at pictures I've been waiting for, weddings, babies. I'll make short comments. ... If you put something you want a comment on or something really funny, it's quite nice to see what others say. I check [for responses] often.

Claire also gave examples of how she uses occasional posting on Facebook to maintain relationships:

I do think that the little comments do help build relationships. If you haven't seen someone in a long time, your relationship is less close, but just little jokes back and forth or 'Hi, how are you doing?' – I think they do help with relationships.

Occasional Posters are likely to reveal information about themselves through the nature of the posts they initiate, as well as the content of their self-initiated posts. They may also be revealing themselves by who and what they respond to, their responses, and in the exchanges between themselves and others. That they do not seem reluctant to post or respond publicly on Facebook may reveal something about their personality.

¹¹ 'Like' is an option on Facebook to click a thumbs-up icon in response to a post or photo.

It could be inferred that Occasional Posters are regularly viewing Facebook because activity from them occasionally appears. Or, their level of activity could indicate that they are not checking Facebook any more often than on the occasions when a post from them appears. An assumption could be made that if they were on Facebook more often they would be a more frequent poster. Several participants in the interviews said that they realized that people used Facebook in different ways and it was helpful to have an understanding of how the people they knew well used Facebook.

Brent: There can be a lot of assumptions if contact is not instantaneous. People check at different times, in different amounts or are not well organized if a message drops when not answered immediately. I think people have very different expectations about it than we do with other types of communication. For example, if you are planning an event through Facebook, someone may not be included if they are not checking. It assumes everyone uses Facebook the same way.

2.3.4 Frequent Posters. According to the statistics gathered during the periods of observation, 13–15% of the approximately 50 young adult Christian Facebook-friends of the researcher post on average one or more times every day. Others may post several times in one day, but not post at that frequency every day. The content and frequency of the posts of Frequent Posters are likely to relate to the events of a particular day. Posts that receive responses may generate further responses from the person posting and as well as additional responses from others that may either continue a thread or make an independent comment to the original post.

While Occasional Posters may be more likely to limit their posts to photos and responses, Frequent Posters are likely to post comments about their day-to-day activities. Frequent Posters can be intentional about what and how much information they are revealing about themselves, both in the posts they initiate and their responses:

Blake: Yes, I definitely want to try to keep things positive, even if things weren't always positive in my life at the time.

Jared: I want to portray myself in a good way that people can respect, or an employer could look at. Or close friends. I want to be careful about what I post.

Frequent Posters may be purposeful regarding what they reveal and do not reveal about themselves through the posts they initiate. But as with other levels of posters, additional

information is revealed about Frequent Posters through the posts of others. Matters about which they are not posting are not disclosed, but an analysis of what those matters are may also be revealing. Concepts related to the shaping of identity on and from Facebook will be further explored in conjunction with social theory within the situational analysis section and using inferences made from participants' comments while discussing their Facebook practices.

2.3.5 Non-users of Facebook. Not represented in the Posting Frequency and Disclosure model are people who do not use Facebook. Young adults in the current generation take for granted that their peers are on Facebook but a few people in the study knew of at least one contemporary who was not using Facebook. Participants were asked what their reaction is when they learn that someone they know is not on Facebook. Common responses are surprise and wonder, both as to why they are not on Facebook and how they manage without being on Facebook. Several participants said that they are annoyed when they learn someone they want to contact is not on Facebook. A few of the participants expressed understanding or admiration for others who are not on Facebook or noted that privacy concerns can keep some people from joining.

Anne: Wow, how do they manage? How do they find out about things? It is really fascinating. I could not do that. You miss out on opportunities if you are not on Facebook. It's horrible that you have to be on (Facebook) to know what is going on but you have to decide if you want to be individual and not be on Facebook or is it worth it not to be included? I'm honestly amazed at anyone who is not on Facebook.'

Brent: I don't think much about it if it's an older person but if it's a younger person, I assume they are making a statement, that they have a principled reason not to sign up.

Of the nearly 50 people interviewed for this research, only one was not currently on Facebook. One other Non-user of Facebook was contacted but declined to be interviewed for the research indicating a conscious, but unexplained, decision to not be on Facebook. Another participant, Daniel, had closed his account at the time of the initial contact but later joined again when he began living abroad. The person not currently on Facebook said that he is able to maintain his relationships with friends without being on Facebook. He primarily uses face to face contact, texting, email, and regular telephone conversations with Close Friends, including those living in other cities. He had a Facebook account for a short time some years ago but

closed it when he experienced a misunderstanding. He anticipates that there will be a need to join Facebook for professional or ministry purposes at some time in the future but until the desire or a need arises, he does not plan to reopen his account. His wife has a Facebook account and regularly shares information from her account with him so in that sense he might be more accurately considered a Non-poster than a Non-user.

Daniel, whose letter appeared at the beginning of this research, made a deliberate decision to close his account after hearing and reflecting on John Bell's talk, 'Jesus, My Facebook Friend' at Greenbelt 2010.¹² His voice will be heard again in the final chapter describing his reasons for revising his practices of friendship through Facebook. Some months after he quit using Facebook, he moved to another country to study and work abroad for a year and again revised his friendship practices by reactivating his Facebook account. Since starting to use Facebook again, he would be classified as a Frequent Poster. Some of the other research participants said that they took periods where they consciously stopped looking at Facebook in order to take a break from it or reestablish priorities. Illustrations of revised practices are presented in Chapter 6.

2.3.6 Posting Frequency and Disclosure model summary

Young adult Christians choose to use Facebook because of the connection and convenience it provides but use it in different ways. Facebook users at every level of posting activity are revealing some facets of their own identity and indicate understandings of friendship that support the importance of affirming who one is and of being in relationship with others. They are saying that they are interested in their friends and in maintaining a connection using available resources. They bear witness to who they are and that a relationship exists between them and their Facebook-friends.

For some Facebook users, their activity level or interest in Facebook may be decreasing. Other forms of digital communication continue to be developed (such as text messaging, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp) which replace some of the functions available on Facebook and keeps them more private. Comments reflect various levels of declining activity, from ceasing to post, to purposefully taking time away from using Facebook, and even looking ahead to not using it any longer.

¹² Bell, John. 2010. "Jesus, My Facebook Friend," talk given at Greenbelt Festival, Prestbury, Cheltenham, August 30, 2010, MP3 audio, <http://www.greenbelt.org.uk/media/talks/15677-john-bell/>.

Blake: I notice that it becomes time-consuming and I have other priorities. I realize that it becomes addictive and I'm always needing to go on and check Facebook. And so when that happens you know you need to take a break, refocus your priorities and make sure that you are staying on task of the more important things in life.

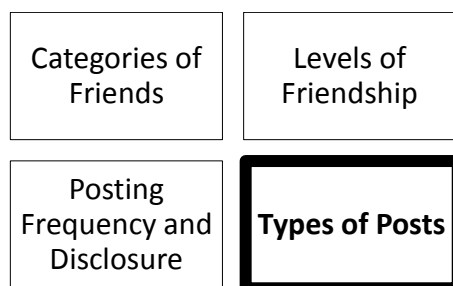
Hannah: I'd rather not have Facebook but you need it to keep up. If everyone else opted out, I would, too. I think when I'm older and more settled, not at uni, then I won't have Facebook anymore.

Young adult Christians express their understandings of friendship in their descriptions of Facebook practices that recognize value in making oneself known to others, being available for friendship, and maintaining an active interest in the lives of friends. However how people present themselves and how they are interpreted may not be consistent. Similarly, fragments of assumptions and values displayed through Facebook and in other friendship practices may not connect with each other. As Brent commented about his observations on the Facebook practices of some Christians:

It's the equivalent of wearing a Christian T-shirt to say, 'Oh, of course I'm a Christian because of my profile', rather than doing Christian things, living a Christian life.

Brent expects honesty in presentation of oneself to friends, noting awareness of the possibility for discrepancy in the witness of word and action. Such awareness validates employing methods of practical theology for connecting everyday practices with theological understandings.

2.4 Types of posts: 'Ropin' 'em in for Jesus'



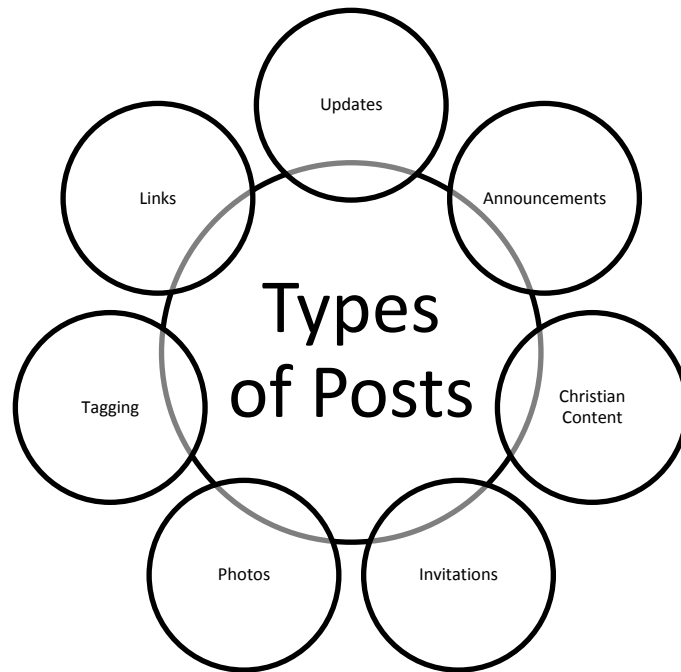


FIGURE 2.4. Types of Posts model

There are a variety of types of Facebook posts made by the young adult Christians who participated in this study, depicted in Figure 2.4. Types of posts mentioned or observed include: status updates on themselves and their activities, announcements, invitations, greetings to others, questions asked of others, responses to others' posts, tags to or posts about others, work/school or organizational information, opinions, jokes, music, art, links to other sites, pictures, photos, and Christian content. Not every type of post is used by most participants or to the same extent. To simplify the model depiction, only the most frequently made posts are depicted in Figure 2.4. Descriptions and examples of types of posts made by the participants follow.

2.4.1 Status Updates. Facebook posts are a means of sharing with friends. Some of the young adult Christians in the study post where they are or have recently been or are going, what they are doing, who they are with, or what they happen to be thinking about at the time of the post. Sometimes a reaction or mood will prompt a post. Examples of these types of posts are:

Amy: i'm heading out to explore the wilds of Victorville... (not really, I'm just going out to find a grocery store). Wish me luck...

Holly: aughagha! Why is it already Thursday!?!?!?

Anne: Leaving Nairobi tomorrow for Kigali on Friday and then Bujumbura on Saturday – so excited for the bus journey through East Africa!

Emily: Just deleted half my pictures. Why? Because Jr. High was not kind to me!

Trevor: Have looked everywhere for it, but still can't find my balance.

Katie: just ate a whole jar of pickled beets. And they were good.

Jessica: I'm an order muppet.

John: I can't believe that I am finished with my first year of grad school. On my way home for the summer!

Tracy: Pesto, arugula, mozzarella, prosciutto, and parmesan pizza, wine, and gin rummy. Perfect porch night!

The tone in these typical status updates is generally upbeat and positive. The information conveyed is not typically of particular significance nor do the posts indicate that a response is expected. They seem to be almost stream-of-consciousness comments that the person is eager to share with a friend. However, a posting on Facebook is an intentional action requiring a degree of effort. Once posted it is shared with multiple people connected as Facebook-friends, and if replied to, the Facebook-friends of the person making the reply. No further action may occur from either the person posting or Facebook-friends who read the post, perhaps the equivalent to an unfinished or one-sided conversation.

2.4.2 Links. Many participants mentioned posting links or 'Likes' to other sites, video clips, music, artists, pictures, news items, or products that they liked, wanted to be associated with, or thought their friends would enjoy seeing. Links to news articles about sports figures and events are common, particularly during signing periods, championship series, and games involving rivalry between favoured teams of Facebook-friends. Links to songs of favorite musicians are posted to reflect the taste or mood of the poster. Some of the participants also mentioned that they enjoyed posting links to songs by artists that may not be well known among their friends as a way of introducing their friends to something new that they had discovered. If a favorite musician is going to be appearing in concert at a nearby location, some of the respondents will post their intent to attend along with a link to the ticket sales announcement or site. Links to news items are more likely to be stories that are unusual or a

significant event on the national or international level that will often trigger posts revealing their response and links to stories of the event or background pieces.

2.4.3 Humorous Posts. Several participants said they enjoyed posting jokes, cartoons, pictures, or other material that they found humorous. It is not uncommon for the same link to be reposted multiple times, spreading it to the Facebook-friend network of each person who posts it.

Both a German and an American postgraduate student mentioned a need to be aware that some people on their Facebook-friend list might not share their sense of humour. They are careful to consider if what they are thinking of posting could be offensive to those who could view it, and if so, they would refrain from posting it. Chase explained,

Sometimes there are things that you don't share though you think it is funny. Some may find it offensive, have different sense of humour, or it would be politically incorrect.

2.4.4 Greetings. Greetings, particularly birthday greetings, are commonly posted on Facebook by the participants. Lauren mentioned that a newsfeed post or picture of someone she has not seen recently might prompt her to post a 'How you doin'?' greeting to them. A similar response was from Sarah who said she likes to post 'Thinking of you' on the walls of friends when they are reminded of them by a reference to their friend appearing on the newsfeed. If a person lists their birthday in their Facebook profile, all of their friends will receive a notification at the first of the week in which the birthday occurs and a reminder will appear on the home page on the day of the birthday. This feature is handled in a variety of ways by the young adults in the study. Some people said it was very helpful to be reminded of upcoming birthdays and they made it a practice to wish all of their friends a happy birthday through a Facebook post. Others use the reminder to prompt them to do something more than posting a birthday greeting on Facebook, such as calling or texting. Lindsey said that she may not always have the time or feel like getting on Facebook but she made a point of checking every day to be sure that she did not miss the birthday of a friend. Joseph, who has an 'official rule' to only maintain 'good Acquaintances in real life' in his friends list on Facebook said that he did not always respond to a birthday notification with a post. Some people said that they felt that if they knew a friend well enough, they would know the date of their birthday and would acknowledge in a way other than on Facebook. A couple of students admitted that the

Facebook reminder prompts an intention to contact a friend on their birthday but that they often forget to follow through.

2.4.5 Announcements. The young people in the study reported that Facebook was the means through which they most often obtained news of significant events in the lives of their friends, including engagements, break-ups, pregnancies, and even deaths. Most participants indicated that they thought that learning of major life events through Facebook was not only acceptable but was actually the preferred means of announcing news. A consensus in one focus group agreed that when they became engaged, they planned to post notice of their engagement on Facebook. The term 'Facebook-official' is commonly understood to indicate something is official. According to Derek:

It's not really real until they announce it to the world on Facebook, because everyone is going to know.

In one of the focus groups it was agreed that the attitude for some people is that once something is on Facebook, it is assumed that everyone will know about it. To not be aware of information that is posted on Facebook is not a failure of communication on the part of the person who posts it but a problem of the person who does not check Facebook often enough.

2.4.6 Responses. Most participants indicated that they thought that if something is posted publicly on Facebook, public responses posted on Facebook are then appropriate. Many of the respondents said that they preferred to see items posted that they could read and respond to quickly because they often do not take the time to read all the way down their newsfeed of recent posts. Claire said that she believes that people post on Facebook in order to get a reaction:

It makes me think why'd you put it up there? You must want people to ask.

However, examples were also given of situations when a post on Facebook elicits a private response. Several people said that if they got the sense from a Facebook post that someone was not doing well, they might send a private message or contact them personally using a means other than Facebook. Megan gave an example of a situation where one of her friends had been 'slammed from someone for lyrics she posted'. She contacted her friend directly to discuss the response and to comfort her. Derek spoke of seeing a post that he felt was misinformed. He initially responded on Facebook but ended up getting together and discussing

it for several hours over coffee with the person who made the post. Fran admitted to being lazy about calling to respond to someone but would do so for things that are 'really private'.

2.4.7 Invitations. Invitations to both public and private events are posted on Facebook by the study participants. For example, if someone is involved in a musical or theatrical performance, they may post a link to a Facebook page created for the event or send an invitation to their Facebook-friend list. Those receiving the invitation have the option to respond with Accept, Decline, or Maybe, post a message, or ignore the invitation. Everyone who receives the invitation is able to see who else is included and the posted responses. Invitations can also be posted to selected individuals on a Facebook-friend list. Participants said that they like being able to see who has replied to invitations and that it was similar to the practice of asking around to see who was going to party. Several people mentioned that the use of Facebook by all of their friends was taken for granted so in some instances people who were not Facebook users were inadvertently excluded when invitations were only posted on Facebook. This was said to create problems of misunderstanding or hurt feelings, which required time and interaction outside of Facebook to rectify.

2.4.8 Posting to Groups. Being part of an organization with a Facebook group or creating a Facebook group for a specific purpose allows members of the group to post announcements, information, reminders about activities or share thoughts with other members of the group. Cassie, a campus group leader, described this use of a Facebook group for this purpose:

We used a (Facebook) group for a dance project. It was really easy to explain and set things up, commend people, post the music, pictures, ideas. It kept it compartmentalized for all those people involved and it was really nice to keep them all informed.

Fran described how helpful she found it to be able to post messages to groups formed for friends based on a common interest. She said,

You can post random ideas, have an open chat. It's really good for me to get my creative juices flowing. You can personalize your posts more because it is an interested group.

While being able to post messages to private groups was generally agreed to be a good way of engaging in more personal conversations, Molly related a difficult experience with trying to keep posts private within a group:

We had a problem last year. A girl added herself to our private group by getting on someone else's Facebook. We really weren't friends with her. It was a difficult situation. There was all sorts of drama deciding what to do. We ended up deleting the group. Really difficult one. We started a new group. We use it for silly pictures that you didn't want to share beyond the group. It's really useful for getting together, seeing who is around.

2.4.9 Photos. The participants in the study frequently and enthusiastically mentioned using Facebook to post and view personal photographs.¹³ This feature allows Facebook users to share events from their own lives and keep up in visual ways with the activities and interests of their friends. Photos posted can be grouped in albums relating to specific events such as trips or parties, or by time periods so as to present a summary of events that occurred in a particular season or term. A mandatory feature on Facebook implemented in 2013 uses previously posted photos to create a timeline on the home page of all members. The timeline feature was introduced after the initial fieldwork interviews so data on responses to it is not available to be included for analysis.

Respondents said that they put up photos from events they participate in to share them with participants in the activity and also to show other people things they have been doing. With the ability to spontaneously take and upload photos with mobile phones, Facebook users are able to share moments of their lives almost as soon as they occur. Downloading photos from digital cameras with editing is also a common practice. Some people mentioned that it was nice to be able to quickly respond to photos with a comment, indicating their interest to the poster. Receiving comments to photos posted is often highly anticipated by the people posting the photo.

2.4.10 Original creative expressions. A few respondents said that they like to draw pictures and upload digital images on their wall. Megan posts electronic drawings and enjoys reading comments her Facebook-friends make in response to the drawings.

¹³ The terms 'photograph' and 'photo' are used here in reference to personal photographs to distinguish them from pictures distributed commercially or through mass media.

Chase, a musician, explained that he did not post his original work on Facebook because he was very cautious about copyright protection and did not want people stealing his ideas.

2.4.11 Opinions and political views. A few of the participants indicate that they 'Like' a political candidate or include a link to a candidate's Facebook page. Generally, links related to politics or controversial topics are not common among the participants. Some participants shared their concerns about posting their political views on Facebook.

Jared: I don't try to cause disagreements, arguments on Facebook because I think that's kind of childish. But I guess I mean my Facebook does have my religious views and it does have my political background.

Brent: I don't take as much care in hiding my political views. I don't try to be overly controversial, I don't try to stir things up but I will take a stand and see what people think about it, get responses.

2.4.12 Christian content. The participants in the study identified several types of posts that they made which were related to their Christian faith, including scripture, sermons, hymns, prayer requests, encouragement, links, announcements of church or other Christian-orientated activities, and theological topics.

Megan posts 'Romans 10' as her religious view. This may reveal her theology regarding salvation but by only listing the reference she is requiring it to be looked up if the passage is not familiar to the reader and they are curious about the content. Other participants quote scripture directly, indicating that the quoted texts are representative of their theologies. For example:

Erin: For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost. – Luke 19:10

Caleb: The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. (John 1:5)

Most participants believe that their identity as a Christian was obvious on Facebook, either through identification of their church affiliation in their profile, updates of church-related activities, or through posts with Christian content. There was agreement in one of the focus groups that posts with Christian content can encourage questions, and invite others to participate in faith-related activities. Several of the participants made it clear however that

they did not use Facebook to evangelize. Anne said that it was ‘very unnatural for her to evangelize’. Justin revealed that,

A lot of the artwork I post is very spiritual, not overtly but representative of spiritual struggles.

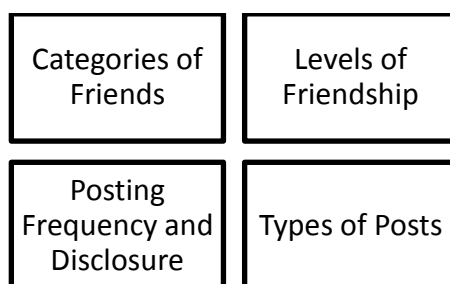
Fran may underestimate the relational value of her Facebook practices in her eagerness to be clear that she is not using it to evangelize:

It [her Facebook profile] says I’m a Christian but I don’t use it for ministry, well I do in a way with relationships, but not ropin’ ‘em in for Jesus.

2.4.13 Types of Posts model summary

A variety of types of Facebook posts are used by young adult Christians to express themselves, indicate matters of interest or importance to them, and share who they are, including their identity as a Christian. As they interact with Facebook-friends, young adult Christians indicate their interest in and concern for others. What they express through their Facebook posts and discussion of their Facebook practices will be used throughout this study to demonstrate that young adult Christians embody their assumptions and values in their Facebook friendship practices.

2.5 Validation of models



Several respondents indicated by email their general agreement to the model summaries, with no further comment. Some participants who responded by email or who met again with the researcher made detailed or insightful comments on various aspects of the text that described the models; some of the input resulted in revisions to the original models as noted below.

2.5.1 Categories of Friends model validation summary and responses

Model summary: Participants mentioned having Facebook-friend connections with people from the following categories: family, family friends, neighbours, school, church, work, organizations, networks. Relationships from any of these categories could be at the levels of Acquaintances, Social Friends, Good Friends, or Intimates. Although concern was voiced regarding sharing information across all categories of friends on Facebook, convenience was an overriding advantage of including all categories on the social network website.

The Categories identified in the Categories of Friends model were validated by the participants with their comments. Rob provided the following input via email in response to his reaction to the Categories of Friends model validation summary:

The categories were spot-on as well. I don't know if this would fall into any current category, but people randomly add other people on Facebook, even if they haven't met them (i.e. friends of a girl, who just added the girl's boyfriend to 'creep' on them). Or someone curious as to who a person is (if they thought they knew them and wanted to confirm, or they want to add them for whatever reason) adds another person. This might be the 'interested, but unknown party' category, not sure how to title it! Generally speaking, this is a fairly small population of friends for many who may not have 'cleaned' their Facebook-friend list [cleaning friend list = purging people, for miscellaneous reasons] – personally, if I don't know someone, I won't add them though.

Rob mentions people who are added to a Facebook-friend list but may not actually be known to the person adding them. In the Category of Friends model, these relationships fall under the Networks/Organizations category at the level of Acquaintance.

Rob also brings up a point which calls into question the decision to limit this research to Facebook practices:

... in regard to "... sharing information across all categories of friends on Facebook, convenience was an overriding advantage." The 'network effect' plays a huge role in my utilization of Facebook (i.e. if fewer friends used Facebook, Facebook wouldn't be as important of a communication tool, as would Twitter, for instance – if they shifted their primary social communications to Twitter). So, not only is the sharing of

information here contingent on my friends utilizing Facebook, it's the degree to which they do use Facebook relative to other social networking sites.

Molly agreed with other validation comments by mentioning another tool for social networking in saying, 'Google+ can keep categories separate but Facebook prevails because you can't categorize by groups. You have Close Friends across all categories.'

After consideration of the comments related to other social networking technologies, the decision was made to maintain the focus on Facebook practices of friendship. Facebook is currently the most commonly used social network for the target group of participants and provided ample material for the practical theology project within the structure of a PhD thesis. Other social communication media as means of practising friendship should be explored in further studies.

Within the Categories of Friends model validation, Molly also pointed out that, 'Neighbors as a category depends on where you grew up. It's not as common for people to know their neighbors unless they grew up in a really close community or small towns.' The category of Neighbours is not applicable to her or to many other of the participants. As a result of her input, Neighbours was eliminated as a category after the validation process.

Erin and Megan both validated the Categories of Friends model by giving examples of reconnecting with old friends as a result of Facebook. Megan cited Family Friends as an important category, made obvious to her in the response and support through Facebook after the death of her father.

Daniel confirmed the validation summary regarding the importance of convenience as is related to the Categories of Friends model. 'Definitely true about convenience – the benefit of having Facebook for practical reasons simply for ease of communication far outweighs the problems I have with it.'

2.5.2 Levels of Friendship model validation summary and responses

Model summary:

Four levels of friendship were identified from the interviews regarding Facebook interactions. Facebook appears to be used differently with Facebook-friends based on the level of the friendship.

Acquaintances – participants have many Facebook-friends who could be characterized as acquaintances: people they have only met but with whom a relationship has not developed, people known through mutual connections, or people known from earlier years but with whom they are no longer in contact except through Facebook. With acquaintances, Facebook is likely to be the only means of connection.

Social friends – these are people that participants are interested in, feel a personal connection towards, and are in occasional or regular contact with. In addition to checking Facebook posts and pictures, participants will occasionally post on their Wall or be in touch via email, group texts, Twitter.

Good friends and Intimates – although these are two distinct levels, Facebook use with people at both of these levels appeared very similar. Friends at this level are communicated with regularly, in person or by text, phone or Skype. A Facebook connection is primarily used for sharing photos or quick communication.

The Acquaintance level of friendship drew the most comments during the Validation process. Megan validated this summary saying, ‘The Levels of Friendship are spot on.’ Molly further validated the same type of network-based Facebook-friend that Rob discussed in his comments under Categories of Friends:

Sometimes people are Facebook-friends but not even Acquaintances really. You are Facebook-friends because your friends are friends of them. You haven’t physically met them yet but it’s likely that you will in the future.

She expanded on her comments by explaining she hates to delete Acquaintances or people she was even just in a class project with because a friendship may develop. Molly gave an example of a girl she knew from middle school that she reconnected with through Facebook during her gap year and they became good friends again. Megan agreed in saying that she has Acquaintances that she may not see until next year but she would not want to delete them because it would be awkward when they did get back in contact.

Chase validated and defined this type of Facebook-friend as, ‘Acquaintance with intended possible growing connection.’ He elaborated in the following way:

There is also a level of Facebook-friends that could be labelled ‘Relationships not yet developed.’ Facebook is used as means to open up a relationship. For example, you

could be part of the same group but may not know one another. For shy people, Facebook may lower a barrier and make it easier to get to know someone.

Another term Chase suggested using was 'Acquaintance through shared interest.' He said he knows a number of friends who have Facebook-friends that are not friends in real life. As examples, he mentioned joining an organization and others in the group friended him on Facebook; or someone known only from a chat group may be a Facebook-friend. Daniel added a similar example stating, 'A lot of my Twitter interaction falls into this category (Acquaintance), too.'

Chase brought up another type of presence on Facebook.

Another example of a type of Facebook-friend not on the model is Hamish the town cat, who has a Facebook profile. Often people don't know who is behind it (a Facebook identity) but give full access to their profile. Other examples are businesses or organizations such as The Citizen or the Sports Centre.

Because these are not the types of Facebook-friends with whom there is likely to be personal interaction, another level is not included to involve them in this research.

The Validation comments regarding different types of Acquaintances add to a fuller understanding of the variation of Facebook-friends at this level. Yet it was determined that to further parse the level with additional terms would not contribute to an analysis of the research.

The description of increased communication with Social Friends resonated with validating participants. Molly described a Facebook-friend that she knows through a mutual friend but whom she considers more as a Social Friend than an Acquaintance. In addition to Facebook, they communicate using Twitter and Instagram.

Joseph said that he has no Acquaintances on Facebook; all of his Facebook-friends are at the level of Social Friends or Close Friends. He agreed with the Validation Summary of Social Friends and added that Social Friends are those who are close enough that he would post on their Facebook wall.

Chase affirmed the understanding of a social friend as one in whom an interest is maintained, however the level of friendship may be difficult to define because the opportunity for or frequency of interaction has changed:

People you are no longer involved with on daily basis but Facebook keeps you informed of. Life goes on without you, but without Facebook you would not even have that contact. Some may have been superficial friends, but some were Close Friends at one time. You can talk to them after a long time apart but it feels like no time has passed. These types of friends are not really Social Friends.

‘Social Friends’ is thus validated as a Level of Friendship based on interest in and increased communication with compared to Facebook-friends at the level of Acquaintance. The means and frequency of communication increases significantly with those considered as Close Friends and Intimates according to validation by participants.

Molly said that she does not use Facebook much with Close Friends. However, she described that with her friend, Hannah, they may Facebook-chat¹⁴ while getting ready in the morning to discuss what they are doing that day, or if they want to hang out. She explains that she does not bother to look at the pictures posted by Close Friends because she was probably there when they were taken. For example, with Aurora, who she ‘sees all the time’, she never ‘Facebooks’.¹⁵ ‘There is no point in being all over the Facebook of very Close Friends.’

Daniel also agreed with the Validation Summary regarding the use of Facebook with Close Friends and Intimates: ‘I email my fiancée far, far more than I ever Facebook her for example.’ Joseph concurred that Close Friends and Intimates are people he would text or phone.

2.5.3 Posting Frequency and Disclosure model validation summary and response

Model summary:

- *Three levels of posters plus the non-poster were identified.*
- *For each type of poster, posts may be either initiated or a response.*
- *At every level of posting, information may be revealed but may also be non-revealing about the poster (or non-poster).*

¹⁴ Facebook-chat is a term used for exchanging private messages through Facebook.

¹⁵ ‘Facebook’ is often used as a verb to describe being on Facebook.

- *Non-poster – interested in others but not revealing himself through posting; may be revealed through others tags or posts.*
- *Reluctant poster – responds but does not initiate posts; revealed by what he responds to.*
- *Occasional poster – responds, posts pictures, comments; revealed through content.*
- *Frequent poster – regular updates or comments; self-discloses through content and also through responses to posts of others.*

Validation of the Posting Frequency and Disclosure model seemed to be thought-provoking to the participants. Rob commented, 'Your analysis on the posters was great! I've never thought about the non-poster + three other poster type dynamic.' Drew added,

The text [Validation Summaries] that you sent me is fascinating; I am especially interested in the list of types of posters – the different motivations of people in different categories would be very interesting. Also, you may want to incorporate research in regards to Google Plus, which allows people with different categories of friends to show different information to the different categories.

Sarah agreed that posting patterns may relate to who is permitted to see individual posts. She commented,

I definitely know people who fall in all categories. Definitely. The model covers all categories but some people may be in more than one category with different friends.

A practice of posting at different frequencies within groups was also mentioned by Daniel, as well as the notion that posting frequency could be related to the current level of activity or inactivity (boredom) in a person's life. His response to this Validation Summary was:

Perhaps consider different levels of posting based on different Facebook groups or different people? Also, the frequency of posting may vary according to boredom levels offline.

This input could be useful in further studies. It also offers insight regarding varying frequencies of posting for the same person at different times or changing patterns of posting over time.

Joseph also said that he likes what the Frequency of Posting and Disclosure model depicts. Joseph could readily identify a Frequent Poster and said he finds her very annoying, although he added that not all Frequent Posters are annoying. He identified himself as a Reluctant

Poster because he does not like to start a Facebook conversation. With Close Friends he will post on their Wall occasionally. Although he does not post status updates he does post hymns weekly – which by definition might put him in the category of Frequent Poster due to the regularity.

Consideration of disclosure as related to posting frequency was of interest to Molly. 'I definitely recognized non-poster, reluctant, and occasional posters. Frequent is more nuanced – some don't keep anything back, others don't disclose much even if they post a lot.' She offered an example:

Hannah is a frequent poster but doesn't disclose information about herself. She posts things such as she is voting for a friend of ours in a student election; currently dancing to a song; going home this weekend. She posts on other people's walls. She doesn't disclose anything important. If you want to know what's going on, talk to her.

Chase was also interested in the disclosure aspect related to posting. He suggested,

The terms revealed/not revealed might be better expressed as explicitly revealed/implicitly revealed. There is not a 'non-revealing' post. If you control what you put on line, you also control what people don't see.

A person can also reveal themselves by not posting: if someone responded to everyone but one or two people, it leads in two directions. The person did not want to engage or they engaged off line. Or maybe they forgot to respond. It could show an attitude towards Facebook.

He gave another example of a friend he 'knows to be on Facebook quite a bit but is only posting items related to their academic accomplishments. She is engaged in many other things but apparently doesn't want to be seen as anything but an academic.' Megan gave a similar example of controlled disclosure, she cited a friend who 'didn't post anything for 3 years then posted when she was accepted for Wycliffe Mission.'

These comments and examples indicate young adult Christians considering more than the content of posts but also their interest in the intent of the posts in perhaps what are attempts to better understand Facebook-friends. Erin indicated interest in intent as well as the opportunity to augment knowledge of a Facebook-friend beyond current posts through examining a history of information about a person on Facebook. She admitted that she

‘Facebook-stalked’ someone through Facebook interactions with others and deduced information that was not explicitly stated in posts. Although the validation comments related to the Posting Frequency and Disclosure model did not prompt changes to the model, they contribute to the understanding of both disclosure and perception as aspects of identity that will be explored in the situational analysis.

2.5.4 Types of Post model validation summary and responses

Model summary:

Types of Posts – types of posts mentioned in the interviews included:

- *Status updates on self and activities*
- *Announcements*
- *Invitations*
- *Greetings to others*
- *Questions asked of others*
- *Responses to others’ posts*
- *Tagging or posting about others*
- *Work/school/organization information*
- *Opinions or Political Views*
- *Jokes*
- *Music*
- *Art*
- *Links to other sites*
- *Pictures (commercial)*
- *Photos (personal)*
- *Christian content*

The Types of Posts Validation Summary was simply a list of the types of posts mentioned in the fieldwork. As a result of the Validation comments, Promotions and Creating an Event were added and Announcements was separated from Invitations from the original list. For implication and ease of display, some of the types of posts will be grouped together or omitted in depictions of the model.

2.6 Conclusion to the Experience Chapter

This chapter attended to the descriptions of young adult Christians' own Facebook and friendship practices. Qualitative research methods were used to gather information on their experience in order to begin to answer the questions of the research:

How do young adult Christians practise friendship on Facebook?

How are practices of young adult Christians affirmed and challenged by, or are themselves affirming and challenging, other Christian understandings of friendship?

From the participants' accounts we can identify assumptions and values that appear to be important to them. Based on what was articulated by the participants, four models were developed. The models provide a framework for analyzing and discussing the fragments of assumptions and values that hint at theological values.

In the Categories of Friends model, young adult Christians described their valuing of relationships and connection, the importance of honesty, an assumption of responsibility as role models, and genuine care for friendships that originate from every category defined in the model. Assumptions and values are discerned in the comments related to the Levels of Friendship model. Participants demonstrate openness to new relationships with Acquaintances. They maintain efforts to be conveniently in contact with Social Friends, and display sensitivity towards Close Friends and Intimates. At every level, they reveal their awareness of the importance of the issues of persistence in friendship as they discern appropriate means of maintaining various relationships as circumstances change over time.

The Posting Frequency and Disclosure model revealed assumptions and values evidenced by Facebook practices. Participants indicate recognizing the importance of making oneself known to others, being available for friendship, and maintaining an active interest in the lives of friends. In describing the various types of posts used on Facebook, they indicate mindfulness in reaching others by how they communicate. By expressing who they are and sharing matters of personal interest or importance, they demonstrate their understanding of friendship. These activities can be interpreted as means of witness and mission.

From listening for hints and fragments of theology from the fieldwork with young adult Christians discussing experiences of practising friendship through Facebook, the argument is made that:

Young adult Christians embody their assumptions and values in their Facebook friendship practices.

The primary issues that emerged are shown in Table 2.2 and will be carried forward in the situational and theological analyses, moving towards encounter, engagement, and connection of young adult Christians' practices of Facebook, friendship and faith.

TABLE 2.2.

Model based on the experience of Facebook practices	Embodied assumptions and values	Issues from experience to move forward
Categories of Friends	Making friends is important	Origination of friendship
Levels of Friendship	Realizing value in all relationships	Persistence in friendship
Types of Posts	Sharing is essential to friendship	Witness to knowing God
Posting Frequency and Disclosure	Message and meaning are conveyed through friendship	Mission of sharing God

Understanding the methods, purposes, and limitations of qualitative research informed the fieldwork and the formulation of the models which provide the structure for the next steps involved in the method of practical theology proposed by Swinton and Mowat. In the next chapter, the situational analysis will consider the Facebook-friendship practices of young adult Christians within the social and technological contexts of friendship practices.

Chapter 3. Situational Analysis – Friendship Practices: Social and Technological Context

Chapter Argument: Facebook friendship practices of young adult Christians demonstrate assumptions and values situated within particular social and technological contexts.

Chapter Introduction

The second stage of Swinton and Mowat's approach continues by engaging in cultural and contextual analysis to understand the situation that has been identified for reflection and critical challenge and explored through application of the methods of qualitative research.

Here we begin to deepen our initial reflections by entering into dialogue with other sources of knowledge which will help us develop a deeper understanding of the situation. At this stage we begin to engage in a disciplined investigation into the various dynamics (overt and covert) that underlie the forms of practice that are taking place within the situation. The intention here is to enhance and challenge our initial impressions and begin to develop a deep and rich understanding of the complex dynamics of the situation. (Swinton and Mowat 2006, 94–96)

The point of this chapter then is to consider how non-theological authorities and theories shed light on what young adult Christians do as they practise friendship. The practice of friendship is placed in the context of wider social and cultural dimensions. This will allow us to analyse where these particular young people are following culture and where they are being counter-cultural. To these ends, we will consider theories of friendship, human development, culture, networks, technology, and communications, in an exploration of the situation in which the practices of friendship described by the young adult Christians are taking place.¹⁶ Based on what was articulated in the fieldwork and inferred from observation, this chapter will make

¹⁶ To present and critique a full range of theoretical positions from the disciplines included would be outside the focus and scope of this project. The theories included are ones that have been widely recognized and critiqued but are not intended to represent the only approaches within their areas. They were chosen for their relevance to the particular data gathered from the fieldwork in order to provide context, augment discussions, and challenge assumptions.

the argument that Facebook friendship practices of young adult Christians demonstrate assumptions and values situated within particular social and technological contexts.

The models developed from the fieldwork will be used to demonstrate that Facebook provides desired qualities of connection and convenience in friendship. Although the terms ‘connection’ and ‘convenience’ were not often explicitly used by the participants in the fieldwork, these two concepts emerged as dominant themes and valued characteristics of the participants’ lifestyles. The importance of both concepts can be correlated to their developmental stage and prevalent features of the environments in which they were brought up and reside. These concepts appear throughout the analysis.

The chapter is organized in four sections, each section discussing a perspective of friendship within situational analysis topics to gain understanding of the models derived from the fieldwork. First, contexts will interpret friendship in considering the Categories of Friends model. The role of technology in enabling connection will provide insight into the Levels of Friendship model. The value of convenience as it results from consumerism will be used in relation to the Types of Post model. The Posting Frequency and Disclosure model will be interpreted in exploring identity development and disclosure in relation to commitment in friendship.

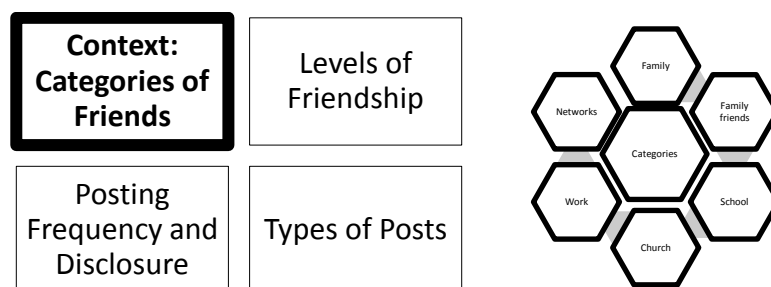
Table 3.1 provides a visual representation of the topics of the chapter as they are situated in the friendship practices of young adult Christians and assumptions and values that are revealed through the models.

TABLE 3.1.

Aspects of friendship in social and technological contexts	Situational analysis topics	Model	Assumptions and values revealed
Context	Peers, ‘pure’ relationship	Categories of Friends	Befriending, caring, and adapting
Connection	Technology, networks	Levels of Friendship	Being in relationship
Convenience	Consumerism	Types of Posts	Staying connected
Commitment	Identity	Posting Frequency and Disclosure	Knowing and sharing

From the friendship practices described by young adult Christians, this chapter will recognize non-theological understandings in regard to the origins of friendship and the persistence of friendship through context, connection, convenience, and commitment.

3.1 Context – Categories of Friends model



The analysis of the situation in this section uses theories of friendship and development as context for the friendship practices of young adult Christians. The Categories of Friends model reflects a practice of thinking of Facebook-friends in terms of categories, usually corresponding to the context in which they are originally known. The Categories of Friends model is situated first by stipulating a common chronological age and peer group experience for friendship of participants. The theories discussed in this chapter are applicable to the development of childhood for the present generation of young adults. Other sources were consulted and add to theoretical understandings for this research project.¹⁷ Influences during developmental stages effected how they gained and processed knowledge, where they learned skills, who they met when, and how they interacted with others. During the teenage years of the participants, social network sites became popular and influenced means of practising friendship and perhaps even their understanding of friendship itself.

An ideal type¹⁸ of ‘pure relationship’ is presented as one reference point for conceptualizing friendship and in comparing theory with Facebook-friendship. Categorization of others is not unique but the way the current generation of young adults uses categories reflects their own developmental and learning experiences. Recognition of the purpose and use of categories of

¹⁷ Arnett 2006; Arnett and Tanner 2006; Erikson 1963, 1965; Gross 2012; Schultze 1991; Stald 2008; Subrahmanyam and Greenfield 2008; Tapscott 1998.

¹⁸ Several of the sociologists and theologians whose work is referred to in this study, including Giddens, Bauman, Niebuhr, and Aelred, use an ideal type as an abstract model. Ideal type is a simplified and often exaggerated construct derived from observable reality. It is used in social sciences to approximate reality to demonstrate a point and is not understood to represent either excellent or average.

friends in defining and practising friendship on Facebook will demonstrate how categorization responds to the desire for convenience in the need for connection.

3.1.1 Friendship as a cultural construct

Since this study focuses on a specific population of young adult Christians in contemporary Western society, an understanding of friendship relates to a particular context. A broader sociological or anthropological study of friendship would be quite different. Mario Aguilar reminds us that ‘friendship as any other social phenomenon is culturally constructed, and that while on the surface of the initial encounter it could be termed a human universal, its manifestations are influenced by localized ways of being human and of being social’ (Aguilar 1999, 170–171). Several additional studies of friendship and community provided theoretical understandings for this research project.¹⁹

Anthony Giddens’ work indicates that the Greeks did not even have a word for ‘friend’ as we are using it in the context of this study. The term *philos* was used to describe close associates but did not discriminate based on kinship and referred to members of a circle largely determined by circumstances (Giddens 1991, 87). Very little choice would have occurred in the composition of a person’s *philos* network, unlike in contemporary practices where a variety of factors, such as social and psychological, outweigh initial proximity and circumstance in the choice of friends. Young adult Christians participating in this study may well discriminate based on any number of factors but their Facebook-friends typically include individuals from a variety of circumstances or categories.

A 2010 study explored the influence of nationalistic culture by comparing Facebook users in the U.S., U.K., Italy, Greece and France (Vasalou, Joinson, and Courvoisier 2010). It examined how developmental design as well as cultural differences effect user motivations, instrumental usages, and time invested in Facebook activity, both initially and over a period of participation with Facebook. Of the two tested motivations for using Facebook (social searching and social browsing), empirical data indicated that social searching was the dominant motivation of users across all five of the countries involved in the study.²⁰ Regardless of nationality, minimal

¹⁹ Bauman 2001; Bell and Coleman 1999; Duck 1973; Duck and Gilmour 1981-84; Ludwig 2006; McCall et al. 2011; White 1992.

²⁰ The two main uses of Facebook by university students identified by Lampe, Ellison, and Steinfield (2006) were social searching and social browsing. Social searching is connecting with, investigating, or maintaining previously established contacts. Social browsing is seeking new contacts or connections.

variation between participants was apparent from examination of the instrumental usages and time invested in the areas of groups, games and applications, status updates, photographs, and frequency of visits on Facebook. Similarly, the findings indicated that national culture was a determinant to only a very limited extent in measures of usage behaviour on Facebook (Vasalou, Joinson, and Courvoisier 2010, 727). In this study differences surfaced in only a few instances during the fieldwork, mostly related to the use of the word 'friend'. Anne explained that the use of terminology related to friends is

... very different in Germany from America. On Facebook you call everyone friends. In Germany you just have a few friends, the rest are acquaintances or classmates and that's fine, people are not offended. ... It's not necessarily more vocabulary but a different way of thinking about friends. ... Facebook was not very popular in Germany at first because people didn't understand why you would want to know about people you weren't really friends with.

Similarities in age, education, use of technology, profession of Christian faith, and structural features of Facebook defined a context more common to the participants than nationality created differences. For participants from any of the nationalities involved, categorization of Facebook-friends by context of how they are acquainted is a common practice. Granting that the influence of cultural understandings in social and behavioural phenomenon is a factor in many practices, the evidence here suggests that differences based on nationality are minimal within the common framework of Facebook.

Understandings of relationships and behaviours as practised in a Western society characterized by consumerism and the prevalence of digital technologies, as well as the developmental characteristics of the peer group of young adult Christians, will thus provide the common constructs in this study for considering friendship in society and as practised on social networking websites.

3.1.2 Developmental stage

The importance of connection is reflected in young adult Christians' use of Facebook. It can be related to features of their developmental stage of life as well as attributes particular to their generation. They also exhibit important developmental characteristics common to previous generations and human development in general. There is a distinct developmental classification known as 'young adults', which is not precisely defined due to a variety of

overlapping measures that could include cultural, legal, occupational, developmental, emotional, sexual, or life expectancy. Depending on the author, study, or application, the age range may be as broad as 16 to 40 years of age. It is characterized in Western cultures by the period in which individuals likely experience their first independence from family, are exposed to more diverse ways of thinking, obtain a higher education, engage in sexual activities, change locations multiple times, and seek full-time employment opportunities. Several important areas of development typically occur during this period: achieving competence, managing emotions, becoming autonomous, establishing identity, extending interpersonal relationships, clarifying purposes, and developing integrity (Chickering 1993, 19). Although these types of experiences have long occurred naturally within this chronological stage of life, sociologists and psychologists have documented noteworthy differences in the characteristics of young people from previous generations to the most recent generations. Examples of these include their use of technology, level of education, close relationships with parents, and high self-esteem (Pew 2010).

The development of the young adult is closely related to their context of family, peers, sexuality, school, work, and media. The influences a person is effected by are largely determined by the time and place of birth, and tend to have an impact on many aspects of a person for his lifetime. What is understood as the 'common culture' is influenced by what has occurred in the world, economy, social trends, and behavioural norms. Similar characteristics of young adults emerge as a result of the context during which a particular generation experiences childhood and adolescence. Those contexts play a significant role in aspects of the formation of self-identity, appropriate social interactions, an informed worldview, and spiritual consciousness. The current generation of young adults, those born approximately between 1980 and 1995, has been labelled with various titles that identify them in relation either to the prior generation, time, or characteristics. Examples of these labels include: Generation Y (McQueen 2007), Millennials (Pew 2010), Generation Me (Twenge 2006), and Digital Natives (Palfrey and Gasser 2008). The common experiences for those growing up in the 1980s and thereafter have real and lasting effects that contribute to the personalities, behaviours, outlooks and attitudes of the current generation of young adults. True to an Arab proverb, 'Men resemble the times more than they resemble their fathers' (Twenge 2006, 3), members of this generation are, in many ways, more similar to each other than they are akin to their parents. That participants in the study are conscious of this is evidenced in the deliberate decisions made regarding Facebook-friendships with parents, friends of parents, and other

adults including professors and employers. Rob described the difference this way in discussing Facebook posts that are read by Facebook-friends from an older generation:

I don't really care about discussing stuff like that (politics, religion) with my peers, my friends, but my Facebook extends. My mom is on there and people that have known me since I was a kid, or jobs. People form judgments if they differ from you so I don't want anyone to judge me on that, especially people I want to maintain respect for.

The Pew Research Center researched and prepared a report in 2010 titled *Millennials: Confident. Connected. Open to Change.*, focused on American young people aged 18 to 29. The title 'Millennials' references the group as the first generation coming of age in the new millennium (Pew 2010). Characterizing the generation as confident, connected, and open to change, the findings were based on surveys from a national cross-section of 2,020 individuals. As with other generations, a majority of Millennials regard their generation as having a unique and distinctive identity. For this generation the greatest percentage of respondents attributed their uniqueness to their technology use. Other key characteristics that the participants revealed about themselves included that they embrace multiple modes of self-expression, they are cautious in dealing with others, they get along with parents and respect elders, and they feel optimistic about their future (Pew 2010).

Participants discussed including people in their Facebook-friend list that they had been associated with from earlier periods in their lives. The Categories of Friendship model identified friendships formed as exposure to others increased first through interactions at school and church. For the first time in history, people have the opportunity to conveniently maintain a connection to people with whom regular contact would have naturally ceased due to changes in circumstances, and Facebook terminology almost guarantees that they are still referred to as 'Friends'.

3.1.3 Loss of childhood for peer group

Relevant for understanding common friendship practices facilitated through social media for the current generation of young adults is a theory of Neil Postman. He claims that the media of communication has affected the socialization process, both in the creation and disappearance of childhood. In the early 1980s, the beginning of the years in which the current generation of young adults was born, Postman was recognizing and chronicling what he described as both the modern invention of childhood and its disappearance (Postman 1994). His thesis is that

the divide between childhood and adulthood is eroding because the skills that formerly defined childhood as a period of development towards adulthood have changed. Corresponding to the environment of the participants in this study, Postman shows how the development of electronic communications, from the telegraph through television, has had tremendous impact on modern childhood. According to Postman's analysis, managed information and sequential learning skills are required to maintain childhood as it has developed. Both the speed and form of electronic communications affect the way one receives and processes information, thus perhaps how one perceives and thinks. Coupled with the undifferentiated accessibility available through much of the electronic media, the division between childhood and adulthood is eroded, according to Postman:

... it is clear that if we turn over to children a vast store of powerful adult material, childhood cannot survive. By definition adulthood means mysteries solved and secrets uncovered. If from the start the children know the mysteries and the secrets, how shall we tell them apart from anyone else? (Postman 1994, 88)

With the introduction of some of the content that can appear in the home through television programmes and internet websites, matters that were once considered personal are no longer private. Complicated and important news events are presented in pictures and sound bites to be quickly grasped with little time allocated to provide context or differing viewpoints. Narratives that are produced for commercial purposes may serve to provide examples, role models, or values. The skills needed to apprehend and interpret the information provided through electronic media are different from the skills needed at the time when most information was provided to children and young adults by parents and teachers, and through printed materials.

The examples Postman provides are at the same time recognizable and sensational, lending both credibility and urgency to his message. Many of his observations seem accurate based on this researcher's experiences as a mother, teacher, and volunteer youth worker. To a considerable degree, childhood play from an early age now involves digital media or organized sports. Different skills are developed as a result of growing up in a digital environment. This is evidenced by a practice of parents and older adults often relying on the knowledge and skills of younger people to assist with common technology issues, including the operation of electronic devices, cell phones and computers. However, while Postman presents strong historical, psychological, and sociological evidence to support his thesis, he fails to

acknowledge the practical and physiological characteristics that will always require a period of childhood. Not to ignore the obvious, children are small and dependent on adults for sustenance and protection. During the period that children are dependent on adults, formation by parents and caretakers still takes place. The impact experienced by the exercising of this responsibility should not be minimized or regarded as unimportant or irrelevant regardless of the changing skills required for proceeding to adulthood. Parents, teachers, family friends, church families, and theologians still have the opportunity to guide children and young adults. This study is an example of recognition of the need to assume responsibility, and is evidenced by the interest, including that of the participants, in using methods of practical theology to stimulate theological reflection on and openness to revision of practices.

In a culture characterized by visual media, speed, and the availability of vast amounts of information, adults themselves may rely less on the skills traditionally developed for a literate culture. Postman sees the changing of the form and content of the symbolic arena that is necessary for growth in a literate culture leading to a merging of the child and adult stages of life. In his view, it is not just childhood but also the adulthood being entered into that is changing, and technology is triggering the changes. The implication of this observation is that we may be observing a generation of children with the knowledge and skills of adults who are at the same time adults with tendencies of children. Young adult Christians poised between childhood and adulthood exhibit characteristics of both stages yet may not fully identify with either. The categorization of Facebook-friends corresponds to the theoretical and cultural understandings of their peer group's development and the environment common to their childhood experiences. These factors, in turn, directly affect how friendship itself is understood. This can be considered through a social theory of ideal friendship involving the use of an ideal type.

3.1.4 *Conceptualizing friendship*

The Categories of Friends model identifies categories of people that the participants engage with using Facebook. Among all the people within a category, some are known well while others are acquaintances or maybe even merely known of. Those persons who are friends are generally regarded as the ones that a person knows well, trusts, and can rely upon for support. Friendships begin from some type of contact between two people, such as an association through one of the identified categories. Developing and sustaining a friendship usually presumes face-to-face contact occurs, although it is also quite possible for strong friendships

to originate or be maintained across barriers of time and distances. This has become particularly evident with the expanding use of technologies that provide opportunities for communication through digital media.

Initial contact may occur in any number of ways but for a friendship to develop, contact must be repeated and probably increase in frequency, the content of discussion must broaden, and the means of communication may be varied (Pullinger 2001). That is, the parties will continue to interact and add topics of a more personal nature to their discourse, and may seek alternative venues for opportunities to intermingle. Although categorization places the Facebook-friend within a specific context, the presence of a Facebook connection evidences an anticipated opportunity for repeated contact and the possibility for broadening of content and means of interaction.

Useful both for articulating a particular way of understanding a modern notion of friendship as well as in conceptualizing how friendship may be influenced in both public and private spaces, is a theory describing the ideal form of the Pure Relationship. Developed by Giddens, this type of relationship is both a consequence and result of the individual freedom and equality prescribed by democracy and modernity, resonating well with opportunities provided through social networking websites. Giddens defines the Pure Relationship as 'one in which external criteria have become dissolved: the relationship exists solely for whatever rewards that relationship as such can deliver' (Giddens 1991, 6). He identifies elements of a Pure relationship beginning with a lack of tethering to external conditions of social or economic life. He finds that modern friendship illustrates this characteristic. 'A friend is defined specifically as someone with whom one has a relationship unprompted by anything other than the rewards that that relationship provides' (Giddens 1991, 90). The 'pure' element of the relationship results from an untarnished motivation. A reflexive structure is implied by the basic characteristic of not being bound to external circumstances which allows for continuous evaluation of the relationship. However, commitment is also central to Pure Relationships, though not necessarily related to length of duration. Acceptance of the risks involved and willingness to forego other opportunities for the possibility of the rewards a relationship may provide, signals a commitment at the time of entering into the relationship. The type of intimacy implied in a Pure Relationship recognizes that a choice was made to commit to

sharing a meaningful lifestyle (Giddens 1991, 95).²¹ Mutual trust and negotiation of self-identity result from self-exploration in Pure Relationships, which exist at various levels and in multiple settings for individuals within social contexts.

Facebook-friend relationships that resemble Giddens' ideal form described as the Pure Relationship can be inferred from the data since an ideal model is designed as a vehicle for analysis. Facebook-friend connections may be established prompted solely by the possible rewards that can be provided by the relationship, which is how Giddens identifies a relationship as 'pure'. The rewards of a Facebook-friend connection include access to the others' posted information and connections to further friends, as well as gaining a recipient for sharing one's own posts. The process of searching to add friends or the process of a continuous review of one's Facebook-friend list for deletion of those with whom a connection is no longer interesting or advantageous corresponds to the reflexivity needed to keep a relationship from being bound to external circumstances. An example of this from the fieldwork is Blake's comment,

I have been meaning to go through and delete some people just to unclutter things but I still haven't done it. And there are some people who anyone I know at the time I will add. But if I know I'm never going to talk to them again, I've been meaning to delete them.

However, in regard to the attributes of commitment, intimacy, and equality, most Facebook-friend relationships are not likely to correspond to the model of Pure Relationship.²² With the possibility of the number of Facebook-friends reaching into the thousands, it not necessary to forego other Facebook-friend connections to enter into a new one. The level of commitment required for establishing or maintaining a connection is minimal. Intimacy resulting from choosing to commit to sharing a meaningful lifestyle may be a feature of some of the relationships connected as Facebook-friends. But the Category of Friends model makes clear that such intimacy is not likely to exist for the majority of Facebook-friend connections who are primarily identified by category. For example, a Facebook-friend might be identified with statements such as, 'I know him from work' or 'She's my friend from Bible Study', indicating

²¹ Giddens defines lifestyle 'as a more or less integrated set of practices which an individual embraces, not only because such practices fulfill utilitarian needs, but because they give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity' (Giddens 1991, 81).

²² Jamieson provides a fuller critique of Giddens' model of Pure Relationship. Jamieson 1999.

that the category of acquaintance is the significant indicator in the friendship, not the relationship itself.

Giddens' theoretical model of a Pure Relationship does not correspond precisely to Facebook-friendships in terms of an ideal of equality between the parties. Total equality is never possible in any relationship but equality is not even an assumption for the basis of Facebook-friend relationships. Indeed, with connections between Facebook-friends originating from contexts of association that include family, school, church, organizations, work, and networks, inequalities in areas of authority, power, education, faith, position and resources are certain. The model of Pure Relationship is useful as an ideal type in terms of identifying recognizable features of a category-based approach to understanding Facebook-friendship in terms of theories of motivation and reflexivity. However, as can be expected in using an ideal type, it falls short as a descriptor when friendship is considered in terms of the reality of emotion or levels of intimacy described in the Levels of Friendship model, which forms the structure for the next section.

3.1.5 Section summary: *Context of friendship in the Categories of Friends model*

The analysis of the situation in this section uses theories of friendship and development in understanding what the Categories of Friends model depicts about the friendship practices of young adult Christians. The participants have grown up in particular cultural settings. They learned and adapted skills needed in an environment immersed in electronic devices and media. In spite of developmental and technological changes that occurred during their childhood, traditional interactions with others and cultivation of friendships were taking place. Young adults may have experienced childhood differently from previous generations but they continue to meet and befriend others from a variety of contexts in their lives in both traditional and non-traditional ways. Their practices, assumptions and values regarding friendship reflect their particular developmental contexts.

Friendship practices discussed from the Categories of Friends model in this chapter relate to the sociological origins of friendship. The characteristics that describe friendship through context for young adult Christians are not recognized as being motivated by theological understandings as much as other influences. The next section of the situational analysis explores how people connect and maintain connection in friendship.

3.2 Connection – Levels of Friendship model



The analysis of the situation in this section uses concepts of networks, social networking technology, and social capital, to explore the Levels of Friendship model describing young adult Christians’ practices of friendship. The Levels of Friendship model demonstrates that Facebook-friend connections include people at different levels of closeness and that the means of communicating with Facebook-friends varies depending on the level of friendship. Young adults want to be connected to others and they want to be connected to the devices that enable the connection to others. In the last section we established the role of context in an understanding of and desire for friendship. This section will consider how friendship connections are enabled as young adult Christians practise friendship using Facebook. The Levels of Friendship model will be viewed in terms of recognizing technology as currently being a dominant factor in fulfilling the desire to be connected. Theories of social networks will be explored along with a look at digital technology as a force in culture, including theories of causality. These topics are significant to understanding social networking website use. The final topic will consider social capital theory in situating the Levels of Friendship model within an environment where connection is enabled through technology.

3.2.1 *Networked individuals*

The extensive use of the internet by adolescents and young adults for social purposes has been the subject of a great deal of media attention and academic research in recent years and provided resources for this research.²³ Other sources have discussed related issues and contributed to an understanding of the pertinent topics.²⁴ As individuals, young adults are not

²³ boyd and Ellison 2007; Mesch and Talmud 2010; Ellison, Lampe, and Steinfield 2009; Hargittai 2008; Lampe, Ellison, and Steinfield 2006, 2007, 2008; Vasalou, Joinson, and Courvoisier 2010; Turkle 1984, 1997, 2011; Palfrey and Gasser 2008.

²⁴ Anderson et al. 2012; Donath 2008; Eede 2010; Di Gennaro and Dutton 2007; Goldman, Booker and McDermott 2008; Lampe, Wash, Velasquez, and Ozkaya 2010; McKenna, Green and Gleason 2002; Park, Kee and Valenzuela 2009; West, Lewis and Currie 2009; Young 2011; Zimmer 2010.

only very interested in forming relationships due to their developmental stage but they are also involved with digital technologies on a regular basis. Familiarity with concepts of networks has developed with the increase in the use of terms associated with computers and digital technologies. The terminology is also being used with an understanding of connectedness in human relationships.

Manuel Castells, a widely-recognized social science and communications scholar, explains a network simply as a set of interconnected nodes (Castells 2000b, 3). Yet network theory is a complex area of research and analysis. Other sources in the study of networks provided a framework for understanding and describing networks in a variety of situations.²⁵ Nodes of individuals form a social network; networked individuals participate in multiple networks. The concept of network individualism explains the transition from society operating in relatively tight, homogenous groups to individuals interacting with other individuals outside of social groups (Wellman 2001). This terminology is useful in understanding the various and overlapping social practices that are engaged in by young adults, many as a result of participation in digital communication technologies and social network sites. Freed from restrictions of time and space, social practices may be enacted using the internet in ways not limited by conditions circumscribed in some place-based relationships. Asynchronous communication allows people to participate at times convenient to their schedules. However, the ability to communicate nearly anywhere and anytime can impact schedules in both positive and negative ways. Participants are able to connect, define, and limit social interactions. This perspective awards a large degree of choice to the individual in terms of when and how to engage with others. Individuals may perceive themselves as in control of their social interactions as a result of the technologies that allow them to participate when and with whom they choose. Yet, individual freedom is also governed by such factors as expected social norms, professional responsibilities, availability of resources, and broader cultural frameworks. By definition, engagement in social interactions requires more than a focus on the individual and thus involves consideration of the other(s) with which one is connected through a network.

²⁵ Castells 2001, 2004; Barbour 1993; Carr 2010; Marsden and Lin 1982; Mitcham and Mackey 1972; Webster 2006; Willson 2006.

3.2.2 Networks as a social environment

In the arena of digital networks, binary logic is used: inclusion/exclusion, connecting/disconnecting. Contemporary social theorist Zigmunt Bauman points out that 'In a network, connecting and disconnecting are equally legitimate choices, enjoying the same status and carry the same importance. ... In a network, connections are entered on demand, and can be broken at will' (Bauman 2003, xii). Bauman goes on to note the prevalence of connections as 'virtual relations' in a liquid life, noting the role of networks in facilitating the ease of participation. 'Unlike "real relationships", "virtual relations" are easy to enter and to exit. They look smart and clean, feel easy to use and user-friendly, when compared with the heavy, slow moving, inert messy "real stuff"' (Bauman 2003, xii). For a society of consumers conditioned to use and dispose, or recycle and repurpose, simply connecting with an option to just as easily disconnect and replace may seem to be a practical and attractive alternative to expending the time and energy required in building relationships.

The internet changes how and who we are able to communicate with, along with who we can be 'friends' with in the composition of social networks. It does not eliminate prior means of communication or ways of and the purposes for interacting with friends and establishing social networks. Studies by the same researchers in 1998 and 2002 reported that the more frequent internet users actually 'increased the size of their social networks, had greater face-to-face interaction with friends and family, and became more involved in community activities' (Kraut et al. 2002, 67). Another positive finding was that those participants who had low levels of social support were aided in forming new friendship ties through their use of the internet (Williams 2006). Keith Hampton makes the case that in the current Western culture there are fewer opportunities to form local social ties and the internet offers a way of overcoming some of those barriers to local tie formation:

What this debate – arguing that community is either lost or completely recreated online – fails to recognize is that community has long been freed from geography and the Internet may hold as much promise for reconnecting people to communities of place as it does for liberating people from them. (Hampton 2001, 217)

Not all studies have produced positive conclusions regarding social outcomes related to internet usage. Norman Nie interprets findings and contends that the internet is an isolating medium since the time spent on-line must come from time previously allocated to other

activities, and those are most likely to be other social activities (Nie 2001). People using portable technologies are observed in social settings and groups surrounded by others but absorbed by what they are seeing on their screen. Occurrences of this behaviour have come to be more ordinary than anecdotal. Using technology and devices such as smart phones, users can be at the same time connected to people at a distance and disconnected from those nearby. Sherry Turkle's work as a social scientist at MIT focuses on the impact of computer devices in everyday life. Her early optimism based on identity exploration made possible through digital communication technologies has been tempered by the realities she has observed (Turkle 1997). She finds that young adults have become so accustomed to being connected at all times and in all places, they often receive and share thoughts at nearly the moment they occur. Yet she notices that technology can become competition for direct attention to and from others. She writes that the current generation is actually dwelling in what she calls a 'culture of disruption' (Turkle 2011). Young adults dwelling within this milieu may be accustomed to it but during the interviews, several participants admitted feeling oppressed by the need to always be available through their cell phone. Some participants said they sought ways to 'unplug' on occasion.

Rob: I use Twitter linked to Facebook. It sends tweets, status updates. ... You can get too many messages coming through your phone. ... It makes me antsy, jittery; I couldn't focus. I have to take Facebook breaks. With too much multi-tasking, I get jittery, feel like I'm on way too much caffeine.

Another danger of networks as a social environment is allowing the other to become a social resource. '... the processes enacted when we use technologies to mediate and manage our social relations are more likely to lead to an instrumental approach being taken to these relations and for a more calculated understanding of relations as (potential) resources to be engaged' (Willson in Hunsinger, Klasturp and Allen 2010, 500). Willson points out that social network sites are explicit demonstrations of the influence of a consumer environment when social relations are regarded as commodities through the practice of acquiring and offering oneself as 'friends'. She qualifies the negative connotation of that observation by saying, 'This does not mean that these forms are unimportant to or not meaningful for participants, only that they represent particular social forms with particular (ego-centric, instrumental) intersubjective implications' (Willson in Hunsinger, Klasturp and Allen 2010, 500). Her theory is

confirmed by the reliance on devices and desire for the connection they provide that is demonstrated by the participants in this study.

Like Turkle and Willson, Postman's interest is not in how technological innovation changes things but in how technologies change people. He differentiates a 'technocracy', where society is still loosely controlled by social custom and religious tradition but is driven by an impulse to invent, and a 'technopoly' where all forms of cultural life submit to the sovereignty of technique and technology (Postman 1993, 52). Technopoly, as he defines it, can and has become a social force due to the explosion of information generated and needed to be maintained through the development of digital technologies. Postman admits that there is no use in lamenting the past, so he is pragmatic in wanting to raise awareness of what has and is continuing to happen as a result of technopoly in order to be prepared for and influence how it affects us in the present and future. Postman observed, '... computer technology functions more as a new mode of transportation than as a new means of substantive communication' (Postman 1993, 118). That communication with others is conveniently facilitated by Facebook and readily available through devices such as smartphones, iPads, netbooks, and laptops, is taken for granted by young adults. Twenty years after Postman wrote *Technopoly*, young adult Christians still need to consider if their practices reveal an understanding of computer technologies as only the transportation. Or, as they reflect on how practices demonstrate assumptions and values, if it is a significant factor in shaping their communication or even themselves. For example, the character limits imposed by some popular communication programs such as Twitter or the abbreviations used for convenience in text messaging truncate the content of communications. In the fieldwork Lindsey admitted that in using Facebook, 'Language is casual, you make superficial comments.' Theories of causality can inform considerations of effects of technology on the user.

3.2.3 Causal flow of technology

John Palfrey and Urs Gasser's agree with others' theories that the young adults who grew up during this period are distinct from young adults in previous generations. They contend that a significant reason for the difference is that they grew up in an environment characterized by the mediation of major aspects of their lives through digital technologies (Palfrey and Gasser 2008). According to these authors, being 'born digital' provides a fundamentally different framework for understanding the influence of technology. That framework influences the young adults' concepts of issues including identity, privacy, safety, property rights, quality,

information, organization, and productivity. A discussion of the role of technology in culture involves consideration of the theories of causal flow to define the various assessments of the influence of technology in the lives of young adults.

The four primary theoretical assumptions about causality that are used to explain the role that technology plays in affecting society are: technological determinism, social construction of technology, social shaping, and domestication (Baym 2010, 24). According to Nancy Baym, technological determinism is a common perspective when new technologies are viewed as 'entering societies as active forces of change that humans have little power to resist' (Baym 2010, 24). She notes that this approach dates back to ancient times and tends to dramatize possible consequences when facing an unknown situation. Within the deterministic perspective are found a variety of predictive responses ranging from enthusiastic to pessimistic (or utopian and dystopian). Enthusiasts may envision the world ever improving through technological advances. Pessimists may only see a loss of control and an inability for things valued to survive. In between these positions are those who may recognize continuity with conditions of the past and remain hopeful for possibilities of the future.

Herring cautions against adults overreacting to what to them is 'technological exoticism' when studying the activities of young adults simply operating in an environment that is natural to them (Herring 2008). Analyzing adult constructions of digital youth she identifies forms of public discourse regarding young people's activities on-line. Noting the importance of realizing that they are presented from observation through an adult lens, she recognizes hyperbole typical of reactions to new and different experiences and also the employment of a strongly deterministic understanding of the role of technology. The work of Postman and the more recent work of Turkle, provide examples that support this contention. Adults researching a generation different from their own, including this researcher, will naturally have insights shaped by their own experiences which can be more useful by providing a different perspective to the situation observed than Herring implies in this article. But the importance of comprehension of the young people's own understanding is well taken and crucial in the application of methods of practical theology for realizing faith and practice as performance of Christianity.

Determinism is not inherently either pessimistic or optimistic, but indicates an attitude of acceptance in the face of inevitability. Herring herself is writing in recognition of the situation and is attempting to reconcile attitudes of technological determinism with understandings of

the domestication of technology. This is most likely the predominant assumption associated with the context of the young adults involved in this study.

Marshall McLuhan recognized mechanical innovations as extensions of man, then seeing the central nervous system extended through electrical technology (McLuhan 1964). When he famously declared 'the medium is the message' he asserted that the medium shapes and controls the scale and form of human association (McLuhan 1964, 7–21). Alerting us to and explaining this understanding provides awareness of the power of the tools themselves beyond the application and intent of the user. This perspective adds to the ability to be reflective about their role in our personal lives. Friendship practices of young adult Christians take place within the wider social and cultural dimension that McLuhan addresses.

The social construction of technology theory awards the power for the development of technologies to the people who develop, market, purchase, and ultimately use them. This perspective views technological change as it arises and is adapted based on the needs and demands of social processes. Baym notes as an example, 'The internet, conceived as a military back-up system, exemplifies technology re-envisioned and transformed by its users' (Baym 2010, 40). Facebook exemplifies the social construction theory of technology as it has evolved and continues to develop new uses and strategies based both on the perceived market potential and end-user input. Social norms in regard to acceptable technology practices, including Facebook-friendship practices, are continuing to be developed and will largely be determined by peer behaviours and expectations. Activities such as posting practices and the types of posts made and engaged with are affected by social influence.

The social shaping and domestication views of technology are probably most in line with the developmental process and understanding of contemporary young adults themselves. As explained by Baym, from the social shaping perspective, '... the consequences of technologies arise from a mix of "affordances" – the social capabilities technological qualities enable – and the unexpected and emergent ways that people make use of those affordances' (Baym 2010, 44). Young people do not feel bound to use their technologies exactly as presented or intended by the developers. They are not afraid to adapt and modify both hardware and software to meet their particular demands. Examples of this type of activity include changing settings to suit personal preferences, improve performance, increase capacity, or making cosmetic changes. The domestication approach '... is particularly concerned with the processes at play as new technologies move from being fringe (wild) objects to everyday (tame) objects

embedded deeply in the practices of daily life' (Baym 2010, 45). In this understanding, technologies are viewed as having both positive and negative consequences, but also as ordinary components of daily life. Social shaping and domestication theories are more complex than discussed here but they resonate with the role of digital media in the lives of young adults.

Albert Borgmann discusses the moral significance and the invisibility of contemporary culture. Both of these concepts relate to young adult Christians' practices of friendship through Facebook. Recognizing three views of technology (substantive, instrumentalist, and pluralist), Borgmann recommends using a 'device paradigm' to incorporate the strengths and weaknesses of the identified approaches (Borgmann 1984). By making distinctions between *things* and *devices*, he is able to signify the value of devices in the convenience as well as the function they ultimately provide. In terms of commonly-used technology devices, they may often be offering entertainment, stimulation, and interaction, which replace other practices that would provide those same wants or needs. Failure to realize the consequences of ambivalence or ambiguity regarding the influence of both cultural expectations and technology on daily practices exacerbates the failure to connect them (Borgmann 2003, 17). Borgmann insists that loss of control to technology is not inevitable but its power in our lives needs to be acknowledged in order to retain focus on conducting practices, including friendship, in meaningful ways.

Young adults do not consider communication technologies to be particularly remarkable because they are central to the environment into which they were born, but they do recognize Facebook as an innovation of their own generation and a familiar platform which is continuing to evolve. The participants in this research indicated that they fully realize that technology contains parameters but they consider the technologies to be tools for their use and believe that they shape them to their own purposes within the given parameters. The availability and capability of the mechanisms are taken for granted as long as they continue to efficiently satisfy needs and motivations for connection. Needs and motivations include the numerous ways they are able to conveniently communicate with Facebook-friends from various categories and levels of friendship. Theories of Social Capital are useful in explaining motivations for connection as part of a situational analysis.

3.2.4 Friendship through connection as social capital

Motivation for establishing and continuing relationships may be understood in terms of potential benefits that accrue as a result of the relationship. The aspect of realizing advantages from being a part of a social network has been considered by several researchers in studies of social network websites. Social capital theories were described by Robert Putnam when he identified a decrease in face-to-face interaction in American life from the 1950s (Putnam 2000). He recognized those interactions as having been an important part of the shaping, education and enrichment of social life. As an example for which he titled his book, *Bowling Alone*, he noted that although the number of people bowling had increased, fewer people were bowling in leagues, signifying that they were bowling alone. This became a metaphor for a trend of reduced social and political engagement. Social capital theory recognizes the productive value of social connections. In further development of his thesis, Putnam identifies social capital as both the social network and the corresponding reciprocity; that is, the network and the effect of the network. He delineates two types of social capital: bridging social capital and bonding social capital. Ownership of social capital provides individuals with a means for accessing benefits that result from relationships with others. Examples of the types of benefits that can result from connections include measureable outcomes such as invitations, employment leads, or investment advice, as well as intangibles such as support, encouragement, or consolation. Research has tested and found that social capital can contribute to 'indices of psychological well-being and satisfaction with life' (Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe 2007, 1146).

Bonding social capital accrues most often from connections held by Close Friends and Intimates, including family members – relationships generally characterized by reciprocity and trust. Also known as 'strong ties' by social network researchers, these are the people who can be called upon to provide support in emergencies or difficult situations. These types of relationships, most often originating off-line, require significant commitment of time and attention but can also be facilitated, at least partly, in social network websites. Social network website friendships that share only an on-line connection with communication limited to primarily reading or viewing public postings could be examples of bridging social capital. Bridging social capital may be comparable to what network researchers call 'weak ties', characterized as a loose connection that does not include emotional support, frequent interaction or reciprocity (Granovetter 1983). Social network sites can actually add value to

weak ties. This theory may not consciously be the motivation behind the practice of adding and retaining large numbers of Acquaintances as Facebook-friends but it provides some endorsement of value in the practice.

Putnam attributed the increase in time spent with technologies that individualize leisure time as a primary cause for the erosion of social capital. Other researchers focusing on social network websites have concluded that young people are not replacing strong tie friendships with friendships originated or primarily sustained through the internet but augmenting their connections and enhancing their opportunities for connection (Baym 2010, Mesch and Talmud 2010, Hargittai 2008). Baym argues that 'mediated interaction should be seen as a new and eclectic mixed modality that combines elements of face-to-face communication with elements of writing, rather than as a diminished form of embodied interaction' (Baym 2010, 51). Gustavo Mesch and Ilan Talmud observe that young people utilize a variety of communication options and provide evidence that 'adolescents may in fact improve their social relationships through on-line communication activities, but also by utilizing the internet as a source of shared activities and common culture among peer groups' (Mesch and Talmud 2010, 95–96). In comparing users to non-users of Facebook, Eszter Hargittai found that the continuous updating on the activities of Facebook-friends provided through Facebook apps and mini-feeds can reinforce friendship ties (Hargittai 2008). This is supported by comments of the participants in the fieldwork.

In a study designed specifically to examine the relationship between the use of Facebook and the formation and maintenance of social capital for U.S. university students, a group of researchers created a Facebook intensity scale. The tool was used to correlate the level of use and integration of Facebook into daily life based on three measures of social capital.²⁶ They hypothesized and their findings confirm that intensity of Facebook use is positively associated with individuals' perceived bridging, bonding and maintained social capital. In lowering barriers to participation, Facebook provides the mechanism which could allow latent ties (possible ties that are not socially active) to become weak ties, offering the additional benefits of bridging social capital (Haythornthwaite 2005, 137). The statistics showed that Facebook is less useful for the creation of strong ties associated with bonding social capital, but is helpful in the maintenance of pre-existing relationships. These findings are consistent with the results

²⁶ For their study, a third type of social capital was identified and labelled 'maintained social capital' that allowed them to 'explore whether online network tools enable individuals to keep in touch with a social network after physically disconnecting from it' (Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe 2007, 1146).

of this study's qualitative fieldwork reflected in the Levels of Friendship model. The added dimension of maintained social capital correlates to Facebook-friends that are likely to be in the Acquaintance category of the model – people with whom there is no longer regular contact due to changes in situation or location, but with whom a Facebook-friend link provides a desirable connection to the past with the possibility of providing future benefits.

The Facebook-friend list of a young adult most likely contains examples of both types of ties and provides advantages from both types of social capital. Mesch and Talmud noted that both bridging and bonding social capital correlate to the tendency to form friendships based on similarities or homophily. They note that the position of an individual in their network is a key factor in how social capital is actually used (Mesch and Talmud 2010). Data from the fieldwork in this study did not explore the participants' positioning within their networks so this particular theory on the use of social capital cannot be related to the models. Findings that an increase in the size of the networks resulted in weaker relationships are consistent with the responses of the young adult Christians in this study and depicted in the Levels of Friendship model. Facebook-friend connections with those at the Acquaintance level of friendship are useful and utilized in ways different from the Facebook-friend connections at deeper levels.

The concept of advantages accruing as a result of connections, i.e. social capital, is prevalent in the contemporary environment. Friendships at the level of Acquaintance are generally weak-tie relationships or examples of the maintained social capital identified by Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe. Social capital research reveals that Facebook use provides benefits as a result of connection through weak-ties and offers the potential for weak-ties to be strengthened. Facebook connections at the level of Social Friends are likely to be examples of bridging capital. They are relationships where benefits are expected in terms of information of mutual interest shared through Facebook, including photos and invitations. Bonding capital is experienced at the levels of Close Friends and Intimates. Recognized through the fieldwork and confirmed in other studies,²⁷ strong relationships possessing bonding social capital accrue some benefit from Facebook use, but not to the extent of connections characterized by bridging or maintained social capital.

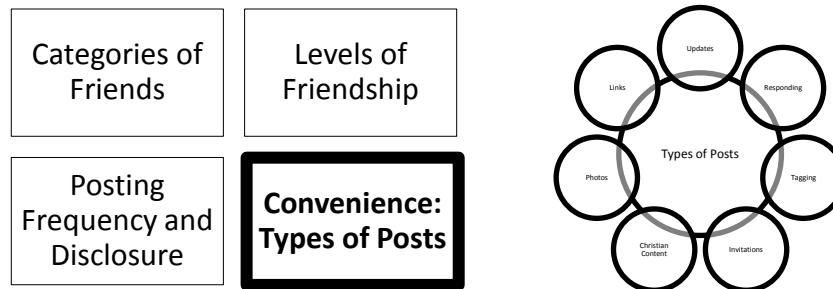
²⁷ Hampton and Wellman 2003; Lee 2009; Valenzuela, Park and Kee 2009.

3.2.5 Section summary: *Connection in friendship in the Levels of Friendship model*

Social networking websites are a particular form of a technological network offering solutions for and exacerbating problems of human connectedness. They add an additional layer of complexity to the topic of interpersonal relationships in contemporary life. Postman declared ‘... it is a certainty that radical technologies create new definitions of old terms, and that this process takes place without our being fully conscious of it’ (Postman 1993, 8). Two of those terms whose usage is changing as a result of the prevalence of social networking websites in the communication practices of young adults are ‘friendship’ and ‘connection.’ The technology that provides for connections and practising friendship influences both means and meaning. Young adult Christians’ Facebook-friend connections at different levels of friendship have different meanings of friendship and practices of Facebook. As young adult Christians recognize and reflect on how networks and technology shape them and their communications, they can make decisions regarding why and how they engage with friends at various levels. Those decisions and practices demonstrate their assumptions and values, formed within particular contexts and providing hints of theological understanding.

Building on the understandings of contexts for friendship discussed in the previous section, the analysis of the situation in this section used concepts of networks, social networking technology, and social capital, to explore how the Levels of Friendship model describes young adult Christians’ practices of friendship. Friendship practices discussed from the Levels of Friendship model relate to the persistence of friendships and develop or require discernment in choices related to the purposes of the friendships. Understanding the influence of convenience and consumerism as forces in making choices is the next step in the situational analysis of friendship practices of young adult Christian.

3.3 Convenience – Types of Posts model



The analysis of the situation in this section will consider consumerism in the desire for connection and convenience, which is reflected in the Types of Posts model describing young adult Christians' practices of friendship.

Maintaining contact with numerous people is difficult. But if the desire to stay connected is strong enough, a way to accomplish it will be demanded, and ultimately provided by the marketplace. Young adults were brought up in a culture that thrives on creating and responding to desire, and making it convenient. The characteristics of convenience and connection that were revealed to be important to the participants during the fieldwork are both products of and facilitated by influences of consumerism. Consumerism is recognized in the situational analysis as a primary force contributing to the development of social networking websites and as an identifiable characteristic of the environment of young adult Christians. This section will explore the related concepts of consumerism and liquidity in lifestyle. The Types of Posts model shows ways that the study participants identified communicating with their Facebook-friends through posting on Facebook. The model depicts a consumerist mentality used to express oneself, respond, and communicate. An example from the Types of Posts model will demonstrate how a Facebook culture provides a way to satisfy the desire for convenience and connection. Assumptions and values are expressed in the context of consumerism evidenced through Facebook posting.

3.3.1 Consumerism as culture

According to Bauman, culture today is no longer a mechanism to improve the populace but instead a device to seduce people as clients and perpetuate desire. This idea is demonstrated in the three ideal types he constructs as tools to analyse and comprehend a social reality: consumerism, a society of consumers, and the consumerist culture. The method of defining and considering an 'ideal type' is again used as a tool to 'throw light on certain aspects of

described social reality while leaving in the shade some other aspects considered to be of lesser or only random relevance to the essential, necessary traits' (Bauman 2007, 27). The use of these ideal types will be helpful to specifically illuminate aspects of the sociological situation into which the current generation of young adult Christians in Western society were born, raised, and which they inhabit.

Placing the terms identifying Bauman's ideal types in relation to each other, the participants in this study are a part of a *society* operating in a *culture* which is defined by *consumerism*.

Bauman differentiates consumerism from consumption at the level of attribution.

Consumerism is an attribute of the society, unlike consumption which is primarily a trait of the individual: "We can say that 'consumerism' is a type of social arrangement that results from recycling mundane, permanent and so to speak 'regime-neutral' human wants, desires and longings into the *principal propelling and operating force* of society ..." (Bauman 2007, 28). It is presumed that what consumers want are the goods and services that are thought to provide comfort and esteem. This statement indicates that the products that provide comfort and esteem may have preempted the conversations that seek to understand what comfort and esteem mean to us as individuals and if or why they are desirable values. Bauman finds that having moved from a society of producers to a society of consumers, the goals of security and permanence have been supplanted by a continual need to replace. With this shift, the aim of the system is no longer gratification but ever-increasing insatiability. In this context, even the meaning of time changes as it no longer moves towards goals in a linear progression but comes to be marked by points which might lead to the chance for new or different possibilities, accompanied by a compulsion to hurry lest an opportunity be missed. Bauman notes that, paradoxically, the impulse for haste in the consumerist era is not as much to *acquire* and *collect*, as it is to *discard* and *replace* (Bauman 2007, 36). Consumerists cannot be burdened with things that will hold them back but will instead abandon unwanted or failed tools for replacement items. Producers oblige by providing goods with planned obsolescence and providers are especially appreciated for assistance in removal and disposal of unwanted goods. The emphasis on speed and efficiency manifests itself in the noted desire for convenience among the young adults, including those participating in this study, who have become accustomed to this prevailing attribute of consumerism in society. Participants' descriptions of their use of Facebook exemplifies this understanding.

Blake: If Facebook didn't exist, I couldn't stay in touch in my own time, my own leisure, to see what they are doing. I can get on about every other week to keep up. It's the only way I can keep up.

The dominance of consumerism leads to a society of consumers, Bauman's second ideal type. Society, then, is understood as '... an authority endorsing and monitoring a comprehensive system of norms, rules, constraints, prohibitions and sanctions' (Bauman 2007, 88). This society is peopled by individuals of all ages, gender, and class distinctions. Notably included is the current generation of young adults who from childhood have been living within a society where consumerism is not just the norm but has become oppressive.

The 'society of consumers', in other words, stands for the kind of society that promotes, encourages or enforces the choice of a consumerist lifestyle and life strategy and dislikes all alternative cultural options; a society in which adapting to the precepts of consumer culture and following them strictly is, to all practical intents and purposes, the sole unquestionable approved choice; a feasible, and so also a plausible choice – and a condition of membership. (Bauman 2007, 53)

A provocative shift occurs, according to Bauman, as membership in the society of consumers transforms the consumers themselves into commodities (Bauman 2007). Their commodification cements their membership in the society. Acknowledging that the individual's role of making oneself a salable commodity may be unconsciously undertaken, it is nonetheless what drives the market to produce the goods that are desirable to the consumer. In a repetitive cycle, the market then capitalizes on the consumer's fears of inadequacy and supplies the immediate, though temporary, requirements for expressing individuality within the accepted norm. An example of this is the marketing to young adults in areas of fashion, music and technology. In order to sustain a society, the participants must wish to continue doing what is necessary for the system to reproduce itself.

The third ideal type Bauman constructs together with consumerism and the society of consumers is the consumerist culture. He explains, '... consumerist *culture* is the peculiar fashion in which the members of a society of consumers think of behaving or in which they behave 'unreflexively' – or in other words *without* thinking about what they consider to be their life purposes ...' (Bauman 2007, 52). These values lead to lifestyles characterized by busyness, urgency, excess and waste. Slogans promoted on university campuses such as

'Recycle, Repurpose, Reuse' seem to encourage an altruistic approach to the environment but may instead be exacerbating rather than relieving acquisitive behaviours. Individuality and freedom of choice are prized, with motivation coming from advertising and competition. However, choice is limited by what consumers demand and are willing to pay for. Responsibility shifts from authority to the individual, with the highest responsibility to oneself. Yet Bauman finds that even with the importance placed on individuality, the consumerist culture leads to difficulty in building a consistent identity. 'The consumerist culture is marked by a constant pressure to be *someone else*' (Bauman 2007, 100). In what is not then a surprising result, the privileging of responsibility to self above all others creates a culture in which it is difficult to maintain significant relationships.

3.3.2 Strategies of consumerism

The young adult Christians who participated in this study are by default involved with the society that Bauman identifies. Within the atmosphere he describes, Bauman's argument that that even childhood itself is being consumed supports Postman's thesis in *The Disappearance of Childhood* (Postman 1994). Children brought up as citizens in the consumer society are observing and learning the world of adult consumers. Bauman points to marketers and authors who he asserts feel they are performing a 'moral task' by indoctrinating children into the ways and means of the consumerist culture (Bauman 2005, 113). Parents in the consumer society bear responsibility as well by first monetizing decisions regarding bearing and raising children, then in awarding children the role of decision maker in consumer choices from a very young age. Childhood may not yet have disappeared but it is being reconstructed and that can be evidenced in practices of young adults on Facebook. In a society that may be conditioned to prize convenience and a feeling of connectedness over developing and nurturing deep relationships, Facebook fits right in.

Discussing the challenges inherent in human relationships and commitment, Bauman acknowledges that human interactions do not end as precisely or cleanly as acts of consumption (Bauman, 2003). Yet in a consumerist culture, he finds '... the odds are overwhelming against the exemption of interhuman bonds from the rule of consumerist patterns, which are cognitive as well as behavioural. As a result, relationships are fast turning into the major and an apparently inexhaustible source of ambivalence and anxiety' (Bauman 2005, 108). Bauman's observation of a consumerist attitude becoming pervasive in the consumerist culture and extending beyond commodities to identities and relationships should

be alarming and provoke serious reflection about the nature of the connectedness that is so highly prized.

Evidence of the consumer aspects of relationships appeared at several points of discussion in the fieldwork. These include consciousness of the number of Facebook-friends on one's own list and the lists of others, adding and deleting friends and acquaintances as Facebook-friends, categorizing Facebook-friends, and recognition of a range of intensity in relationships with Facebook-friends that were identified and validated in the Levels of Friendship model.

According to Bauman, the established customs of life in the consumerist culture are characterized by consumerism's continual activity of replacement. The familiar motif of the modern era was the steadily progressing pilgrim moving through a solid world building a purposeful identity in time and space. Bauman finds that in a liquid world, solidity has been replaced with motion and shapelessness. Identity must not be bound or fixed and time is measured in fragments (Bauman 1995). He identifies four different and integrated strategies that replace the notion of a pilgrimage through life. Young adults would likely recognize examples of each of them among people they know and may well identify some of the inclinations within themselves. The *stroller* moves playfully through life, observing but not engaging. The *vagabond* does not belong anywhere and travels with no destination in mind and finds no place to settle. The *tourist* moves purposefully from home, but it is from a home that both comforts and catapults to the point where it becomes confused with the destination. The *player* inhabits a world of continual discrete games with no rules or serious consequences. In a society populated by these strategies, there is an effect on the building and maintenance of relationships and subsequent moral obligations.

All four intertwining and interpenetrating postmodern life strategies have that in common, that they tend to render human relations fragmentary ... and discontinuous: they are all up in arms against 'strings attached' and long-lasting consequences, and militate against the construction of lasting networks of mutual duties and obligation. (Bauman 1995, 100)

If these are the best strategies for staying afloat in a liquid life created by the consumerist culture, it would not be surprising to find young adult Christians using a variety of means for connecting with others. The Types of Posts model is useful in examining how the participants

value and utilize the convenience offered through Facebook to be connected within their social and technical context.

3.3.3 Types of Posts model situated in consumer culture

The values of convenience and connection identified from the fieldwork are recognizable by-products of the consumerist culture described by Bauman. Facebook-friendship practices as evidenced through posting and the types of posts created reflect the desire to be connected and the demand for convenience. To critically engage Bauman's observations about culture specifically with fieldwork results distilled into the Types of Posts model, we will consider photo posts. Photos are one of the most popular features for the Facebook users in the study. As noted in the Types of Posts model narrative, most participants actively use Facebook to share photos of themselves and their activities as well as enjoy viewing photos posted by their Facebook-friends. This feature is valued for the convenience it provides in allowing them to share events from their own lives and feel connected through the visual record of the activities and interests of their friends.

In the midst of living in a liquid environment, posting and managing photos is a way of attempting to maintain control over what images others are able to see about oneself. Participants in a liquid environment may wish to remain fluid and keep options open, but respondents said that they consciously post photos that are flattering to them or show them in a positive light. They said that they do not hesitate to remove tags that identify them in a picture if they are unhappy with a picture someone else has posted. They may even to ask friends to remove a picture altogether, although friends do not always cooperate with their requests. These types of Facebook activities also relate to identity and disclosure but within the context of this section, they exemplify Bauman's assertion that in the consumerist culture participants allow themselves to become commodities. An interesting example is that of Erin who said that she was so conscientious about what might be seen about her on Facebook that she had just changed her Facebook name several times because someone had refused to take a photo of her off of Facebook. A very different attitude was revealed by Sarah who said she was displeased that a photo of her was posted that had her knickers showing. But she admitted that she had not gotten around to untagging (removing) her name from the photo or asking the person who posted it to remove it. Both examples demonstrate an awareness of oneself from the perspective of others who may be viewing photos of them which could be extended to being presented as a commodity. Erin did not accept the representation of herself

as presented in a particular photo but Sarah was complacent about it. Each made her own choice of response to the situation.

Posting photos can be a very public way of announcement. Most participants said they appreciate the feature of posting photos on Facebook both for being able to use it themselves and to receive information about Facebook-friends. But in one interview the practice was criticized in a particular circumstance that could be interpreted as a challenge to a culturally accepted practice. Cassie resented that her sister used Facebook to post photos and announce major life events before sharing the news in a more personal way to family and close friends. She described her sister's practice and her own reaction:

She [Cassie's sister] had a baby. Didn't call us, just posted pictures on Facebook. She doesn't call, just expects everyone to see it on Facebook. It sucks because you are friends with everyone on Facebook but as your sister, I feel like I should know you had your child before the whole world, before there were 56 other comments before I got on Facebook.

This situation is an example of one young adult using the convenience offered by Facebook posting to connect and share important news. But it also illustrates a lack of sensitivity to those who feel that their relationship entitles them to priority of communication. Cassie was hurt by her sister favouring convenience over the closeness of their connection. Within a consumerist framework, the sister was taking advantage of her communication options; it appeared that Cassie felt like she, and the baby, were treated like commodities for the convenience of her sister.

The ability to view photographs of others, especially those taken over time, was cited as helpful in getting a better sense of a person. It was also mentioned as a concern. Respondents liked being able to look at photos of people they were just getting to know as a means of learning more about them quickly and vetting them as potential friends or possible romantic partners. This is possibly a habit related to aspects of viewing and choosing among products in consumerism. Members of a focus group discussed that being able to review photos posted over a period of time was helpful in revealing more about a person than what may be disclosed in very recent interactions, photos or posts. Several people voiced concern as they wondered what the implications might be later in life for people who grow up having their activities, perhaps including youthful indiscretions, recorded in posted photographs on

Facebook. So while the participants like having consumerist opportunities to view others' photos, they did not necessarily like the practice applied to themselves. This is particularly true for Facebook-friends outside of their peer group and unknown future Facebook-friends. Citing the reliability of the outcome to forming opinions based on photos posted on Facebook, several participants discussed issues of parents or other adults viewing their posted photos or photos that others posted and tagged them in. It was agreed that people may come to incorrect conclusions based on photos posted on Facebook. Nevertheless, most participants were willing to assume the possible risks in order to enjoy the convenience and connection realized through posting photos on Facebook.

Viewing photos of others was described as helpful in maintaining a feeling of closeness with others. Seeing the photos of a friend causes Clay to think of things he has done with the friend. He said he will tag photos of those events to remind his friend, adding, 'It makes it easier but not a great way of doing friendship.'

Participants also described viewing the photos of Acquaintances as a means of just keeping current with people they did not see often, in some instances referring to the practice as 'Facebook stalking.' Derek defined the term in the following way:

It's just kind of a means of seeing what they are doing now. Kind of keeping up with them without contacting them.

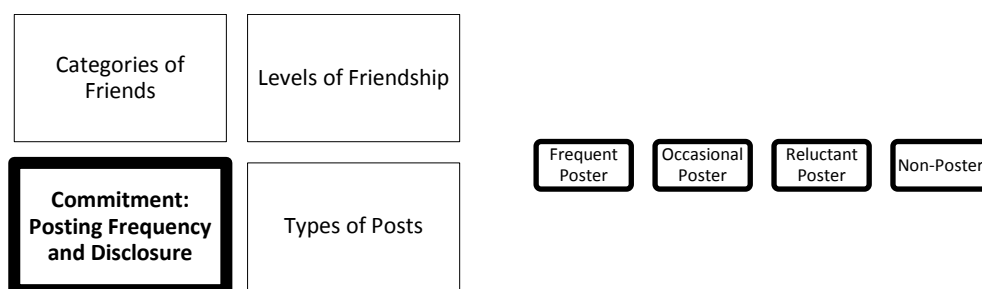
These examples and comments demonstrate the privileging of convenience common to consumerism but bring up again the question of the purpose in maintaining the connection.

3.3.4 Section summary: *Convenience in friendship in the Types of Posts model*

The young people involved in this study are situated in the midst of a significant personal development period concurrent with an evolving technological environment, located within an atmosphere that nurtures a craving for convenience and connection. To the analysis of contexts for friendship and ability to connect through technology, the analysis of the situation in this section adds theories of consumerism in the desire for connection and convenience. The Types of Posts model can be understood within a consumerist society. Consumers want options and convenience, both of which are provided through posting on Facebook. Facebook-posting gives users a convenient platform and multiple options for sharing information as well as learning about and engaging with others. These features provide possibilities of making

them both consumers and commodities. Consideration of the effects of consumerism may lead to understandings that connection is not always enhanced but can also be threatened by convenience. Consideration of activities and results can lead to reflection on Facebook and friendship practices which may be revised and better express assumptions and values. The final section of the situational analysis chapter uses the Posting Frequency and Disclosure model to consider commitment in friendship.

3.4 Commitment – Posting Frequency and Disclosure model



The analysis of the situation in this section will use theories of identity and disclosure with the Posting Frequency and Disclosure model in consideration of commitment in friendship for young adult Christians.

Being known and knowing another is a deep human desire. To offer oneself as a friend requires an understanding of self and a willingness to reveal oneself to another. The Posting Frequency and Disclosure model reflects discussions of the study participants regarding posting patterns of Facebook members and what is revealed to Facebook-friends through Facebook. At all levels of posting frequency, information is disclosed from content as well as posting practices. Disclosure may derive from various factors such as frequency, patterns of initiation/response, or with whom one is engaged.

Being committed to another is a joining together of mind or spirit. Joining together does not signify or require sameness of the individual minds and spirits joined, but a desire and willingness to be connected to someone at the deepest level. Commitment to be a friend requires more than a mere connection and is often not convenient. In this final section of the chapter we will look at theories of identity and disclosure in relation to Facebook practices that explore ideas of how understanding self relates to friendship and commitment.

3.4.1 Identity

Theories of identity construction and disclosure are used by sociologists, psychologists, philosophers, and researchers in attempting to understand and explain friendship, and recently in relation to social networking.²⁸ A classic in the field of identity theory is Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* which uses a 'dramaturgical' description of social interaction. He relates self-presentation to theatrical identities of 'front-stage' and 'back-stage' behaviour (Goffman 1959). A 'front-stage' performance is likely to follow a prescribed role, dictated by the particular situation such as motivated student, dedicated employee, obedient son or daughter. In the case of Facebook identities, roles such as well-connected friend, popular partier, compassionate supporter, or serious political observer may be assumed. Goffman suggests that 'back-stage' behaviour may be more genuine and even contradict the role played 'front-stage'. Through the creation, improvising, and acting out of various roles, identities emerge. Facebook presentations through profiles and posts may be analogous to front-stage behaviour. Off-line attitudes and interactions may be representative of the back-stage behaviour.

Identity formation can be considered as a developmental stage of adolescence where individuals begin to realize their strengths and weaknesses and define themselves in terms of distinctive qualities (Buckingham 2008, 2–3). Young people experiment, reflect, redefine, and reinvent themselves in conjunction with their culture and the influence and responses of others. They develop a coherent identity that is validated by the recognition of others. From these approaches that view adolescence as a time of identity development, it can be expected that social network websites have a significant effect on the construction of identity for young people who are participants. Turkle as well as Palfrey and Glasser confirm that 'Digital Natives' regularly experiment on-line in ways that shape their identity formation (Turkle 1997, Palfrey and Glasser 2008). Options provided by the posts and responses on Facebook provide opportunities to experiment, explore identity, and develop skills.

In addition to active time spent on Facebook in presenting oneself, commenting, or responding to others through posts, much passive time can also be spent in reading posts, viewing photos, or browsing. These activities can influence how young people see themselves

²⁸ Bargh, McKenna, and Fitzsimons 2002; Christofides, Muise and Desmarais 2009; DiMaggio et al. 2001; Manago, Taylor, and Greenfield 2012; Mehdizaden 2010; Nabeth 2009; Shoemaker 2010; Walker 2000.

in relation to the others they are observing. As danah boyd²⁹ studied youth participation in social network sites over a number of years, she identified aspects of teen practices on social network sites that serve as means of working through impression management and identity issues, social development, and opportunities for consideration of conceptions of public, private, and context (boyd 2008, 127). In addition to the connection benefit aspects of participation, she points out that important social development is taking place through activities on social networking sites. This development adds to a young person's understanding of who one is as a person and a friend, what it means to be a friend and have a friend, and the types of exchanges that are appropriate and inappropriate at various levels of friendship.

Thus although an identity is by definition unique to each person, the understanding that it develops as a process and can appear differently based on circumstances indicates that it is not a fixed attribute. The life strategies characterized by the stroller, vagabond, tourist and player, demonstrate Bauman's assertion that in contemporary culture, even the problem of identity has changed: '... if the *modern* "problem of identity" was how to construct an identity and keep it solid and stable, the *postmodern* "problem of identity" is primarily how to avoid fixation and keep the options open' (Bauman 1995, 81). If there is a measure of schizophrenia in postmodern³⁰ personalities, as Bauman suggests (Bauman 1995, 99), then it is not surprising that identity is difficult to establish and express for a young adult, and difficult to ascertain and assess for an observer. Identities are influenced and reformed as they are disclosed to and intersect with the identities and reactions of others, in both face-to-face encounters and through digital media such as Facebook.

3.4.2 Disclosure

Consistent with Goffman's theory of identity, performance and impression-making play a part in the way young people present themselves on their social network sites. Creating and changing profile photos and personal information is a way of exploring and disclosing identity. It often involves a great deal of reflection in determining how a person wants to be perceived by others who are viewing the person's Facebook pages. Goffman's 'dramaturgical' analogy can be extended from identity formation to presentation and applied in terms of disclosure in

²⁹ danah boyd uses a lower-case convention for her name.

³⁰ In several instances in the text the term 'postmodern' is used. There are a number of viewpoints that this term can be used to characterize but it commonly refers to denial of the general philosophical viewpoints that were assumed from the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. In the context of this text this general understanding is sufficient.

the digital environment. Self-disclosed information provided by the user in a profile, along with profile photos and lists of preferences would be examples of the front-stage performance described by Goffman. Back-stage behaviour may become apparent in disclosures through tagged photos posted by others and responses to posts. Presentation and disclosure may or may not be consistent with each other as together they form an impression of identity.

Although the participants in the study said they were very conscious of how they appeared through Facebook posts and photos, self-disclosure is never totally controllable. Types of self-disclosure that Dean Cocking and Steve Matthews identify as common to interactions conducted via the internet are 'controlled self-disclosure' and 'controlled responses' (Cocking and Matthews 2000). These correlate in the Posting Frequency and Disclosure model to 'initiates or responds to posts'.

As the model and narrative indicated, the participants realized they gained information revealing facets of the identity of Facebook-friends through what was intentionally posted to make a certain impression as well as through other indicators. Links to sites, references to cultural icons, pictures, or jokes, can be signals to identity on social networks. Signals can be useful in discovering qualities about individuals that may not be directly observable or factors that cannot be quantified, such as thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and trustworthiness. Signaling theory is used to explain how integrity is maintained in communication. The types of signals that are classified as *conventional signals* are common in human communications and are typically the type of information provided in presentation or self-disclosure on social network sites (Donath 2008, 233). Transparency in conventional signals is ensured through rules, laws, or social mores. In the case of social network site postings, it is through connections with others who can either verify or challenge information posted. In a large and open environment such as the internet, opportunities for deception are real and receive considerable media attention. Authenticating information may be available from signals provided and responses of others. When forms of interaction are taking place as a part of a relationship in addition to the social network communication, distortions created by controlled self-disclosure will be reduced. That is, face-to-face interaction with Facebook-friends can validate or contest impressions created from disclosures made through digital media.

If people are judged by the company they keep, a Facebook-friend list can also be a source of disclosure and an indicator of identity. Sonja Utz builds on prior research in impression formation considering the impact of three types of information. The information she studies

are: self-disclosed information about friends, information provided by the profile photos of Facebook-friends, and system-generated information relative to friend connections (Utz 2010). Her conclusions indicate that the list and content of one's Facebook-friends has an impact on the impression presented in social networking websites and should be carefully considered in impression management. An uncategorized list of Facebook-friends accumulated on a social network site may provide a signal based on volume but it does not typically provide an indication of the nature of the relationships. The friend list itself provides a social context – an expectation that one has similarities or similar interests to their Facebook-friends (McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Cook 2001). Facebook algorithms rely on that expectation in using the friend list to suggest other members as friends based on mutual Facebook-friend connections.

Comments posted to and communications with friends are examples of controlled self-disclosure and controlled response signals. They could actually be more accurate as indicators of attitudes, temperament, and personality, than lists of likes, dislikes, or favorites, which may be posted to create a certain impression. Similarly, the quantity of interaction with a friend online could be a signal of the importance of the relationship. It could also merely reflect that the people involved have time available or choose to spend time on the internet.

3.4.3 Friendship in relation to self

The role of identity and disclosure in friendship is considered by Dean Cocking and Jeanette Kennett as they distinguish three accounts of friendship (Cocking and Kennett 1998, 502). Their first account of friendship is of one that is predicated on the Aristotelian (*mirror view*) of friendship: the self-love we share with each other. The basis of the friendship is the desire to be with someone like oneself. The *mirror view* requires understanding of one's own identity, at least to the extent that aspects of self can be recognized in another. Although the terminology of sharing self-love is not likely to be an admitted motivator for issuing or accepting a Facebook-friend invitation, it can be recognized as a reason for establishing a Facebook connection with someone with whom one already identifies. The Facebook-friend invitation signifies interest in access to further information and provides the opportunity for additional interaction.

A second account of friendship is based not on the seeing of oneself in the other, but on self-disclosure and reciprocity of divulgence (*secrets view*) that take place. This view of friendship recognizes that friends trust each other enough to share personal matters. Privileging each

other in this manner provides a framework for sustaining and growing the relationship. 'This self-disclosure is thought to cement the bonds of trust and intimacy that exist between close friends ...' (Cocking and Kennett 1998, 503). Significance of behaviours and outcomes shown in the Posting Frequency and Disclosure model can be interpreted in the context of this account of friendship. As articulated in the fieldwork and discussed in the model narrative, at every posting frequency, information is revealed. The type of information revealed is not necessarily of a personal nature nor is it typified by mutual sharing. Features of Facebook that provide friends the opportunity to exchange private messages can facilitate the exchange of personal matters as required for the *secrets view*. A status update or the tenor of a posting could prompt a friend to privately make a contact outside of the social network site in order to exhibit concern or offer other opportunities for personal interaction. But the types of self-disclosures made and signals interpreted through posts on Facebook are not likely to be of the mutual and private nature presumed for the *secrets view* of friendship. This is consistent with the discussions indicating that disclosures made through Facebook interactions are not the type of exchanges that result in or contribute to commitment in friendship.

While recognizing the long-standing philosophical and theoretical views that privilege the importance of identification with and self-disclosure to friendship, Cocking and Kennett's argument is that a third account of friendship, a *drawing view*, more accurately explains close friendship than the mirror or *secrets view*. This perspective is experienced when '... as a close friend of another, one is characteristically and distinctively receptive to being directed and interpreted and so in these ways drawn by the other' (Cocking and Kennett 1998, 503). This account can be realized when one does something for, or with, a friend that they would not normally choose to do. Then in the act of participation, one changes in ways that reflect the nature of the friend. The *drawing view* may also be involved in the process of interpretation to the relational self that is created as a result of the friendship. The effects resulting through this account of friendship may be experienced through maintaining Facebook-friend connections with people from the varieties of categories of friendship. That is, connections to friends on Facebook from numerous categories open up opportunities for exposure to diversity of ideas and activities, which may draw one towards changes that reflect the nature of the others. However, the level of involvement prescribed by the *drawing view* is not generally offered or required by interactions on social network websites. Conceivably, there are opportunities for such a connection to develop when friends share information, photos, and links. This could generate involvement of a friend in an activity or subject for which they had not previously

expressed interest. According to how the study participants described their use of Facebook, the primary role of Facebook that would result in realizing the *drawing view* would be as it is used to facilitate communication regarding plans for activities to be shared in an off-line venue.

Cocking continues an analysis of theories of close friendship in relation to self by considering the same views when friendship is facilitated through text-based internet mediums. In the article “Unreal Friends”, Cocking and Matthews analyse the limits imposed by the structure of the media. Their research led to the conclusion that significant factors required for a close friendship are lacking, or are at least different, in relationships mediated through the internet:

What is distorted and lost, in particular, are important aspects of a person’s character and of the relational self ordinarily developed through those interactions in the friendship which ... are precisely the kinds of interactions largely weakened or eliminated by the dominance of voluntary self-disclosure found in the virtual world.
(Cocking and Matthews 2000, 231)

A primary contention of the authors is that the structure of the medium itself (the internet) ‘creates a distorting filter on those aspects of ourselves which ordinarily are disclosed to the other in friendship’ (Cocking and Matthews 2000, 224). Causes of the distortion can include how contextual factors affect content, how mutual interpretation is affected by internet communication, and the likelihood of disclosure being skewed intentionally or unconsciously.

Adam Briggie purposefully counters the provocative title of the article and claims of Cocking and Matthews after Facebook had made on-line friendship connections commonplace (Briggie 2008). He argues that it is possible to develop meaningful friendships that are actually aided by the distance and deliberateness of a digitally-mediated environment. Briggie points out that off-line friendship is very often constrained by barriers to honest communication, created by existing social structures and relationships. Removal of those barriers, facilitated by the structure of the technology, can allow for honesty and reflection that are uninhibited by social expectations. He advocates for the significance of the written word and a contemplative nature developed by reading that leads to the revelation of self: ‘The literate mind tends to stand at an abstracted remove from the concreteness of lived experience, which fosters greater introspective self-judgment’ (Briggie 2008, 76). Close friendships do emerge and flourish through difficulties. But Briggie makes the point that insincerity and compromise are

certainly not limited to on-line relationships and some obstacles may actually be reduced by the possibilities allowed for in the space provided by digitally-mediated environments. Comments made by the young adult Christians involved in the study confirmed aspects of these viewpoints.

Lindsey: [Through Facebook] You can learn a lot about someone's life without even knowing them.

Participants said that they fully realize that some things posted on Facebook may be skewed, inaccurate, or difficult to interpret. But since most participants claimed that they personally know the majority of their Facebook-friends, they feel that they can correctly interpret the meaning of their Facebook-friends' posts. If they have any doubt about the meaning of a post, they said they will either ask or ignore it altogether. In examples given of misunderstandings due to posts, participants said they are usually able to clarify it in further posts or with a text message or phone call. Some participants agreed with the point Briggie made regarding preferring to have time and space to develop thoughts before responding. Others said that they worry that their direct communication skills are suffering as a result of their regular use of digital means of communication. In terms of disclosure, the participants are very aware of the possibilities of inaccuracies and miscommunication but consider themselves savvy media users who are able to correctly discern the veracity of disclosures made by and about others.

3.4.4 Section summary: *Commitment in friendship from the Posting Frequency and Disclosure model*

Having a sense of one's own identity and opening up to another person is foundational to friendship. Theories of identity, disclosure, and friendship indicate a certain level and type of mutual disclosure and interaction are necessary for commitment to a close friendship. Presentation and interaction through Facebook provide opportunities for developing identity, as well as means of disclosure. The Posting Frequency and Disclosure model demonstrated that disclosure can take place at any posting frequency on Facebook, but participant responses indicated that the types of disclosures made or revealed through Facebook were incidental to the development of most friendships. So while Facebook use may contribute to identity development and provide opportunities for disclosure, the values of convenience and connection offered through Facebook are not enough to provide all that is needed for commitment in friendship. The analysis of the situation in this section uses theories of identity

and disclosure based on the Posting Frequency and Disclosure model in recognizing that young adult Christians demonstrate assumptions and values in their commitments of friendship.

3.5 Conclusion to the situational analysis chapter

The conversation that started with the fieldwork continued in this chapter with situating practice within the social and technological contexts in which young adult Christians develop as individuals and engage in friendship. By placing the practices in the context of wider social/cultural dimensions we began to see where the participants are following culture and where they are being counter-cultural. This chapter used models derived from the experience documented in the fieldwork to structure the situational analysis and made the argument that Facebook-friendship practices of young adult Christians demonstrate assumptions and values situated within particular social and technological contexts. Table 3.1 is shown again to summarize the points of the chapter.

TABLE 3.1.

Aspects of friendship in social and technological contexts	Situational analysis topics	Model	Assumptions and values revealed
Context	Peers, 'pure' relationship	Categories of Friends	Befriending, caring, and adapting
Connection	Technology, networks	Levels of Friendship	Being in relationship
Convenience	Consumerism	Types of Posts	Staying connected
Commitment	Identity	Posting Frequency and Disclosure	Knowing and sharing

Friendships arise through relationships originating from different contexts of knowing others. Categories of friendship identified by the study participants are characteristic of developmental aspects of their age, generation, and social contexts. The practice of maintaining Facebook-friend relationships with people known from all of the categories of experiences and levels of friendship reflects a desire for connection that is facilitated through technology and networks via Facebook. Young adult Christians use a variety of types of Facebook posts resulting from the convenience expected and demanded in a consumer culture. Consumerism pervades the cultural landscape for young adult Christians in Western society and relationships are not exempt from its influences, as evidenced in their Facebook

practices. Commitment is desired and advanced through understandings of identity, disclosure, and adaptation. These conditions are not fully achievable through Facebook.

This chapter explores the origins of friendship and persistence of friendship through context, connection, convenience and commitment. Non-theological theories shed light on how young adult Christians engage in friendship practices through Facebook. Assumptions and values demonstrated within their Facebook and friendship practices can also be interpreted in light of theological understandings of friendship presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 4. Theological Analysis – Faith Practices:

Friendship in a Christian Theological Context

Chapter Argument: Facebook friendship practices of young adult Christians both affirm and challenge, and are themselves affirmed and challenged by, theological understandings of friendship.

Chapter Introduction

Young adult Christians demonstrate assumptions and values as they engage with others within their developmental, social, and technological contexts. Their practices have also been shaped by their experiences in and interpretations of the Christian communities in which they have been brought up or have chosen to participate. We now consider theologies of friendship based on Christian doctrine and theological understandings.³¹ The particular theologies that form the basis for this analysis have not necessarily been directly introduced as part of the formation of the participants but provide a Christian theological context for affirmation of and challenge to practices in either direction.³² Considering these ideas in relation to the findings from the fieldwork allows the argument to be made that Facebook friendship practices of young adult Christians both affirm and challenge, and are themselves affirmed and challenged by, theological understandings of friendship.

Identifying assumptions and values in what the participants say and in what they do allows for critical reflection on the situation in light of scripture and tradition – the next step in the process of practical theology (Swinton and Mowat 2006, 95).

This is not of course to suggest that theology has been absent from stages 1 and 2. It is simply that at stage 3, we begin to intentionally reflect theologically in a more formal manner. Here we begin to focus more overtly on the theological significance of the

³¹ Significant texts that added to a theological understanding of relationship, friendship, and community include: Bonhoeffer 1954; Buber 1970, 1973; Ford and Stamps 1996; Hauerwas 1994; Hauerwas and Pinches 1997; Heyward 1982; Kruschwitz 2008; Leith 1977; Markham 2003; Muers 2007; Nygren 1932-39; Schaeffer 2006; Simon 1997; Wadell 2008b.

³² Background for theological formation and youth ministry was provided by reference to works by, or in editions edited by: Astley 1994; Astley and Francis 1992, 1994; Astley, Francis and Crowder 1996; Atkinson 1995; Beaudoin 2000; Garber 1996; Jones 2001; Schultze 1991; Smith and Denton 2005; Smith and Snell 2009.

data that we have been working with in stages 1 and 2, and how it can be used to develop our understanding of the situation we are exploring and the practices which emerge from the various practices we encounter. At this stage we begin to develop the conversation by drawing out the implicit and explicit theological dimensions of the situation, sifting through the data and exploring the ways in which they complement and challenge one another; searching for authentic revelation in a spirit of critical faithfulness and chastened optimism. (Swinton and Mowat 2006, 96)

In this chapter we bring the practices and values revealed by young adult Christians as they discussed their Facebook friendship practices into relation with theological traditions of friendship. As in the situational analysis, we will look for the areas in which they correspond and where they deviate.

Consistent with the structure of Tables 2.1 and 3.1, Table 4.1 lays out aspects of friendship in a particular context, relates them to theological topics, and associates the fieldwork model that provides the experience of the young people. The last column identifies theological values for encounter and engagement that emerge from the analysis.

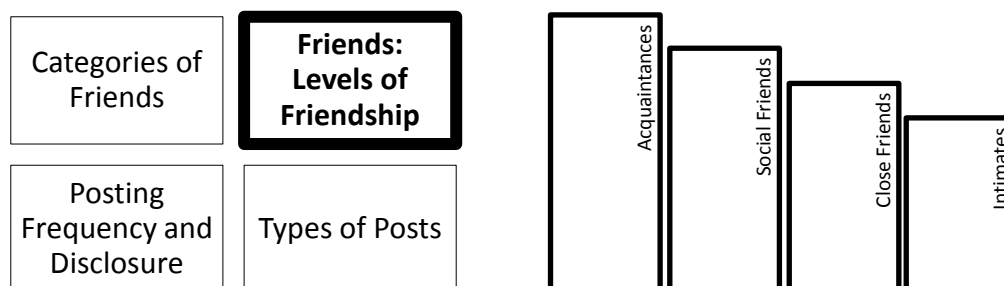
TABLE 4.1.

Aspects of friendship in a theological context	Theological analysis topics	Model	Theological values for encounter and engagement
Friends	Friends as gifts	Levels of Friendship	Purpose in friendship
Neighbours	Friendship as a school of Christian love	Categories of Friends	Inclusion, exclusion, particularity in practising friendship
Witness	Christ demonstrating friendship	Posting Frequency and Disclosure	Faith disclosed through friendship
Mission	Friendship with God	Types of Posts	Mission through friendship

The order of discussion of the models is arranged to best accommodate the development of the discussion of theological perspectives on friendship. Theological understandings of friendship will first be explored through concepts related to friends based on disclosures from the Levels of Friendship model. This will lead to the discussions related to friendship with neighbours, as witness and in mission, based on the other models. The following chapters will

then explore the encounter, engagement, and connection of the faith perspectives and practices of the participants and the theologians.

4.1 Friends – Levels of Friendship model



In the situational analysis, the Levels of Friendship model was considered in relation to concepts of networks, social networking technology, and social capital for facilitating connection. The analysis described the role of digital networks and social networking sites in providing a convenient means for being in connection with people from a variety of categories and at different levels of friendship. Social capital theory offers explanations for why a person would desire these connections. For young adult Christians, theological dimensions of being in relationship with people at different levels of friendship are part of their motivation for and practices of friendship.

The levels of friendships recognized by the young adult Christians and the ways they discussed their practices of friendship through Facebook at each level reflect their own understandings and theologies of friendship. Because of the differences required for investing in friendships at different levels, many more relationships at the level of Acquaintance can be maintained than can be sustained as Close Friends or Intimates, or even Social Friends. Persistence in friendship should therefore be considered and intentional in every relationship. This study finds that the differentiation of friendships makes a theological statement that others are valued and can be considered as friends in different ways, each of which can exemplify the diverse ways of fulfilling a calling in Christ.

4.1.1 Aelred of Rievaulx – The practical theologian of friendship

Understandings of friendship, even in contemporary times, go back to Classical philosophy. Plato, Aristotle and Cicero all analysed, discussed and wrote about friendship in relation to the human condition (Plato in *Lysis*; Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics*; Cicero in *De amicitia*). Each of

these philosophers contributes a structured analysis of friendship which is reflected in the Christian theologies of friendship that were developed later. The references made here to Classical philosophers are not intended to be analyses of their writings on friendship. They are introduced for the foundation they provide for society's understanding and use of friendship relationships and in relation to the development of theological understandings of friendship. The basis for a practical theology of friendship may well begin in the work of Aelred of Rievaulx.

Born in 1110 in the northern part of Britain, Aelred of Rievaulx was from a family of priests who were well-connected to nobility. He was a popular and successful member of the court of King David I of Scotland. Dissatisfied with the superficiality he experienced in life at court, he joined the Cistercian monastery of Rievaulx in 1134. He held the position of abbot from 1147 until his death in 1167. Aelred's interest in Classical thought on friendship prompted him to develop and present understandings of friendship from a Christian perspective. His work was widely circulated and highly regarded for several centuries after it appeared. It has recently been brought back into the conversation about friendship following interest from scholars and the publication of several books.³³ Aelred's interest in the actual practice of friendship sets his work apart from the more philosophical approaches of the Classical period. According to Elizabeth Carmichael, it distinguishes him as 'the practical theologian of friendship' (Carmichael 2004, 101).

Aelred can enter into the dialogue with young adult Christians practising friendship on Facebook with his very clear identification of different types of friendship which correspond to the levels identified in the fieldwork models. His dissatisfaction with superficiality in social contexts may also strike a chord with Facebook users. Aelred's insight, questions, and suggestions were addressed to young adults to prompt reflection intended to 'foster intimate friendships among ourselves and with Christ' (Billy in Aelred 2008, 18). Although novices at the time of his writing entered the Cistercian order at the age of eighteen, their lifestyle and experiences are quite different from the lifestyles and experiences of later generations of young adults. Understanding the context allows for adaptations to contemporary practice. Thus in using Aelred as a source for theology on friendship and as an interlocutor with contemporary young adults, several factors should be applied (Billy in Aelred 2008). First,

³³ Aelred 1990, 2001, 2005, 2008; Bartlett 2013; Chakravarty 2012; Daniel 1994; Hallier 1969; Race 2011; Sommerfeldt 2005, 2006.

Dennis Billy notes that Aelred wrote in an environment and to an audience immersed in a meditative approach that sought insight from reading and prayer. The hierarchical worldview of his time was a different organizing concept than what young adults encounter today. There should not be an expectation that everything Aelred writes will be immediately applicable to contemporary situations. It is equally important, then, not to impose modern understandings onto his advice. Christians do well by following his example of considering scripture, tradition, and theology to apply with experiences and reflection on personal practices.

Aelred's theology of friendship reflected his study of Classical philosophers' writing on friendship. In particular, Cicero's *De amicitia* served as the model for Aelred's Christian version of a treatise on friendship in *Spiritual Friendship*. Cicero's work is written as a dialogue between Laelius (a much respected, older friend) and his sons-in-law. Laelius shares his wisdom regarding friendship and the practice of it based on his experience of close friendship with his friend Scipio. Through the discourse, Cicero makes clear his own view of friendship as an exceedingly good and natural gift from the gods. Rather than a relationship based on need or utility, friendship allows each friend to grow in goodness and equality with each other. Cicero famously defined friendship: 'For friendship is nothing else than an accord in all things, human and divine, conjoined with mutual goodwill and affection' (Cicero *De amicitia*). Cicero offers advice on choosing friends, drawing a line in ethical matters, being aware of the transitory nature of some friendships, and withdrawing from friendships when necessary.

Influenced by Cicero's style of writing and his philosophical ideas on friendship, Aelred adopted the dialogue format in his treatise to address friendship from a Christian perspective. The use of the dialogue allows the argument to be more practical in orientation and avoids some of the difficulties of an abstract philosophical discussion. Aelred also provides advice for entering into and ending friendships. Aelred acknowledges the influence of Cicero in beginning the dialogue in Book One of *Spiritual Friendship* by agreeing with his young friend, Ivo, on Cicero's understanding of friendship as a starting point.

Cicero was well educated and familiar with the Greek philosophers. Although he mentions Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Cicero does not make use of the threefold distinction of 'the good, the pleasant, and the useful' upon which Aristotle's system of ethics is built and is more obviously mirrored in the Aelred's theology of friendship. Aristotle defined ethics in relation to the goal of attaining happiness through achieving the greatest possible good for humanity. He categorizes friendships based on their design and purpose. He sets forth an ideal of friendship

embodied by willingness to sacrifice for the good of the whole and the necessity of growing in virtue as friends. These values are also present in Christian theologies of friendship.

Using a threefold scheme reflective of Aristotle’s designations of ‘the good, the pleasant, and the useful,’ three types of friendships are defined by Aelred: Spiritual, Carnal, and Worldly:

... let one kind of friendship be called carnal, another worldly, and another spiritual. The carnal springs from mutual harmony in vice; the worldly is enkindled by the hope of gain; and the spiritual is cemented by similarity of life, morals, and the pursuits among the just. (Aelred 2008, I.38)

The correspondence of Aelred’s designations of friendships with contemporary relationships identified in the Levels of Friendship model is mapped in Figure 4.1. along with Aristotle’s distinctions. That these general understandings have persisted, although labelled differently and not precisely matched, evidences their applicability to enduring conditions of friendship. But it also predisposes the imposition of a hierarchical structure from very early on in the consideration of friendship. This is a significant influence to be considered and challenged. Using both Cicero’s and Aelred’s identification of friendship as gift will provide a theme for examining the levels of friendship in this section.

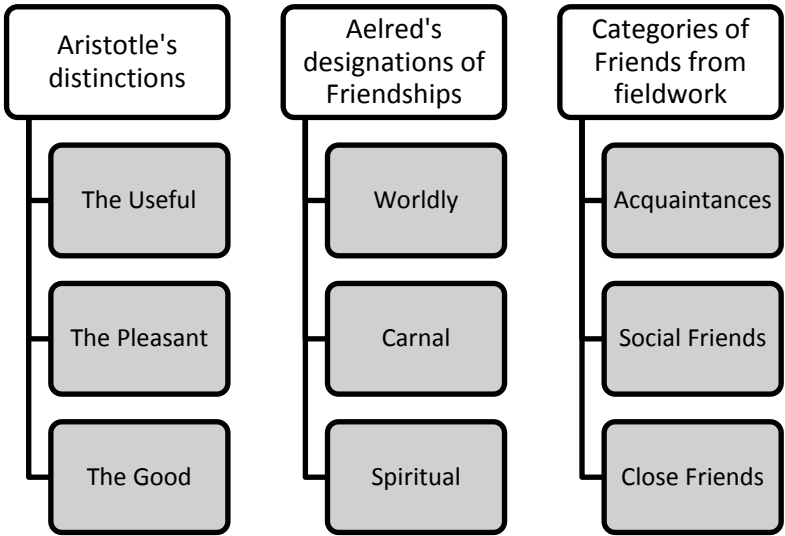
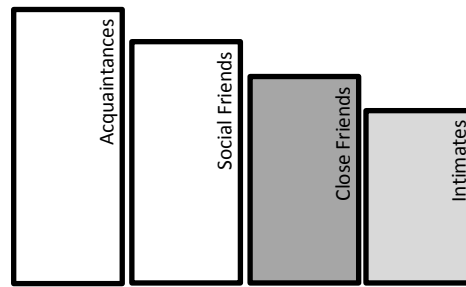


FIGURE 4.1.

4.1.2 The gift of friendship: *Spiritual Friends, Close Friends and Intimates*



Aelred identifies the deepest level of friendship as a Spiritual Friendship, on which he focuses his explanation to the younger monks. He describes the Spiritual Friendship as a friendship between two Christians with Christ as the third presence. ‘Here we are, you and I, and I hope a third, Christ, in our midst’ (Aelred 2008, I.1). The Spiritual Friendship is the Christ-centred relationship on which Aelred builds his theology of authentic friendship: ‘For spiritual friendship, which we call true, should be desired, not for consideration of any worldly advantage or for any extrinsic cause, but from the dignity of its own nature and the feelings of the human heart, so that its fruition and reward is nothing other than itself’ (Aelred 2008, I:45). He clearly sets the Spiritual Friendship apart from other friendships in terms of motivation, purpose and outcome. Aelred’s counsel is based on his understanding that true friendship does not just happen. ‘It [true friendship] comes about, in part, through God’s graceful movement in the hearts of those whom he calls and, in part, through those who strive to cooperate with that grace by doing their utmost to enter into friendships based on the love of God and neighbor’ (Billy in Aelred 2008, 78). Although Aelred indicates that he understands friends as gifts from God, he is very specific in his instructions for accepting others to be Spiritual Friends. Four stages are involved in the process of two persons becoming friends, beginning with selection, followed by testing, then admittance, and the final harmony of friendship.

The method for entering into friendship prescribed by Aelred is very different from the acceptance of Facebook-friends described by the young adult Christians and reflected in the Levels of Friendship model. Brent makes it clear that there are only two responses to a Facebook-friend request:

What makes Facebook tricky is fact they are using the word friend, so saying to someone I don’t want to be friends with you sounds harsh though the truth of the

matter is you are not friends with everybody. Even people you may be very regular acquaintances with, you may not call them friends. So when friend appears on the screen: accept or ignore.

Although various criteria in extending or accepting invitations for Facebook-friendship are considered, the participants do not expect the Facebook-friendship itself to be the basis for a close friendship. But as the Levels of Friendship model illustrates, the means of communicating increase at the closer levels of friendship which is consistent with the types of interaction involved in the testing and admittance steps advised by Aelred. Applying Aelred's schema to Facebook-friendship practices would look something like this:

Selection = Extending or accepting Facebook-friend request

Testing = Viewing profile, observing posts and responses

Admittance = Increasing methods of communication

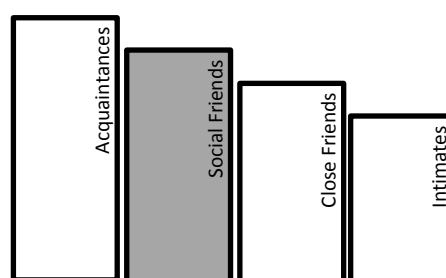
Harmony of friendship = Close or Intimate Friendship

Delineating the process as Aelred does provides a useful model to consider in regard to modern friendship practices. We understand from the participants that friendships are generally entered into unreflectively, especially in regard to Facebook-friendships. But any of them have the potential to develop into meaningful relationships. The volume and nature of Facebook-friendship represented by the Levels of Friendship model may seem at odds with the careful selection process prescribed by Aelred. Yet it may actually represent the process in progress as many Facebook-friendships are entered into but fewer relationships advance to the deeper levels of friendship. With regard to nurturing significant friendships, the model indicates that these relationships require attention and interactions such as those that take place using methods of communication outside of Facebook. Participants were clear in stating that at the level of Close Friends or Intimates, Facebook was primarily used only for sharing photos, links, or quick communications. Phone calls, text messages, and face-to-face conversations are the predominant means of communicating with friends at the deeper levels of friendship. Interaction and communication are required for providing the type of fellowship and mutual support needed to encourage growing closer as friends and following Christ. This does not occur through contact limited to Facebook, according to the young adult Christians participating in this study.

Aelred's perspectives on practising friendship at the level of a Spiritual Friendship adds a criteria missing from the data from the fieldwork. No distinction is made in the Levels of Friendship model for friendships specific to friendship with fellow Christians. The participants discussed being friends with other Christians at all the levels of friendship as well as having friends who are not Christians at every level of friendship. This discussion is missing from Aelred's treatise but can be understood considering the cloistered environment in which it was written and the specific audience of young monks that he was addressing. But his knowledge of people and friendship was not limited to monastic relationships and that is indicated by his descriptions of friendships in addition to Spiritual Friendship.

Being mindful in selecting friends does not imply that only those who are already perfect should be considered for friendship. Aelred lists characteristics and behaviours that may prove injurious to a relationship. His discipline of patience in monastic life allows him to advocate for the Christian practices of forgiveness and repentance, acknowledging power in grace to transform lives. This understanding allows for the possibilities for gifts of friendship at other levels besides the Spiritual Friendship described by Aelred. His understanding of friendships other than Spiritual comes through in his descriptions of and advice for the friendships he calls Carnal and Worldly, corresponding to Social Friends and Acquaintances in the model.

4.1.3 *Delightful gifts: Carnal Friends, Social Friends, C. S. Lewis, and Facebook*



As depicted in the model, young adult Christians are likely to refer to many people as 'friends', due to the nomenclature of and connection to Facebook-friends. Even in relationships with other Christians, most friendships are not what Aelred describes as Spiritual Friendship. Aelred used the term 'carnal' for friendships that are centred on pleasure. According to Aelred, Carnal Friendships begin with affection, seek pleasures, are guided not by reason but advance 'toward everything heedlessly, indiscriminately, lightly and immoderately' (Aelred 2008, I.41). These friendships are described as puerile and shallow, perhaps transient in nature, lasting

only as long as the pleasure is sustained. Aelred counsels avoidance of this type of relationship but he does leave open the possibility for them to be redeemable.

A starting point of shared pleasure is certainly a reason for entering into a friendship and probably accounts for most of the voluntary connections and Social Friendships that people establish with others. Thus in a Christian understanding of friendship related to Facebook, these types of relationships are significant in number, purposes, and meaning. The writing of C. S. Lewis provides a theological voice on the relationship identified in this study as Social Friends. Lewis is widely-read and well respected as an academic, novelist, and Christian apologist. His essays and writings have had significant impact on Christian theology since the 1930s. The participants in the study may be influenced by the theological ideas in his children's series set in the fictional land of Narnia.

With many experiences of friendship to draw on, the friendship described by Lewis as one of the natural loves in his book *The Four Loves* provides an interpretation of friendships based on common interest and pleasure. The friendship he describes may be more recognizable to modern understandings of Social Friendships but still resembles Aelred's description of Carnal Friendship. *The Four Loves* was written towards the end of Lewis' life and nearly thirty years after his conversion back to Christianity. From considering 1 John 4:8, 'God is love', Lewis identifies need-love and gift-love, which when extended to concepts of pleasure are augmented by appreciative-love (Lewis 1977, 26). These qualitative distinctions of love are demonstrated within the four broad types of love that he bases on the Greek words for love: *phileo*, *agapē*, *eros*, and *storge*. Again there is not a perfect correlation but the 'Four Loves' identified by Lewis could be interpreted as corresponding to the Levels of Friendship model in the following way:

agapē – charity – Acquaintances

phileo – friendship – Social Friends

storge – affection – Close Friends

eros – romance – Intimates

In relation to the other loves he discusses (affection, romance, and charity) friendship is described as '... the least natural of loves; the least instinctive, organic, biological, gregarious and necessary' but also 'the happiest and the most fully human of all the loves' (Lewis 1977,

56). Lewis finds that friendships are based less on self-disclosure and more on common interest and the mutual delight resulting from shared interest: 'Friendship arises out of mere Companionship when two or more of the companions discover that they have in common some insight or interest or even taste which the others do not share which, till that moment, each believed to be his own unique treasure (or burden)' (Lewis 1977, 62).

The distinction he makes between companionship and friendship is that while companions are doing something together, the interest of the friends is more narrowly focused. This notion of friendship is akin to what most people experience with the many others whom they consider to be Social Friends. He also points out that common interest may not be common agreement. 'The man who agrees with us that some question, little regarded by others, is of great importance, can be our Friend. He need not agree with us about the answer' (Lewis 1977, 62). Neither Lewis nor the model specify that the common interest must be belief in Christ for a friendship of a Christian to develop. People can be Social Friends with those with whom they share a special interest in the same authors, movies, sporting events, shopping experiences, restaurants, or websites.

Lewis acknowledges a possibility that friendship will not remain in a plane of simply occasionally enjoying the company of or interacting with someone with a shared interest. While it is not necessary to becoming friends that two people know a great deal about each other, he recognizes that knowledge of a personal nature will be disclosed or shared over time in the course of the friendship. This is represented in the Levels of Friendship model by the modes of communication increasing as the level of friendship increases. Lewis describes the essence of friendship in a passage that seems to anticipate the virtual experience of internet connections:

We meet like sovereign princes of independent states, abroad, on neutral ground, freed from our contexts. This love (essentially) ignores not only our physical bodies but that whole embodiment which consists of our family, job, past and connections. At home, besides being Peter or Jane, we also bear a general character; husband or wife, brother or sister, chief, colleague or subordinate. Not among our Friends. It is an affair of disentangled, or stripped, minds. Eros will have naked bodies; Friendship naked personalities. (Lewis 1977, 66–67)

Lewis would agree with Aelred that this type of friendship is not without danger. The dangers Lewis recognizes relate to exclusivity, indifference, or deafness to others. Gilbert Meilaender responds to this possibility stating, 'But a group of friends does not exist for the sake of exclusion; its exclusions are, so to speak, accidental' (Meilaender 1998, 95). Although some characteristics of exclusivity, privacy and confidentiality have value in protecting a friendship, they can also lead to arrogance and pride, which is hurtful to others and sinful. Relationships with Social Friends can pose some theological concerns related to exclusivity. Practices of friendship on Facebook are fairly transparent by default, but the use of privacy settings and groups can narrow the visibility and access to restricted lists of friends. Possible responses to these issues did not come up in the fieldwork discussions and are thus not reflected in the models. The questions raised are considered in reflection on the connection of practices of Facebook, friendship and faith.

The basis for the friendship that Lewis understands from his reading of scripture and his own experiences may not result in the same understanding of a Spiritual Friendship that Aelred describes from his monastic point of view. Both types of friendship are part of a Christian's experience as recognized in the Levels of Friendship model. Christian friends should find pleasure in sharing with other Christians their common love of Christ and pursuit of a life worthy of his calling. Christians also have meaningful friendships with non-Christians based on other shared interests or pleasures. In the friendship Lewis describes, it may seem to the participant that the friendship was a matter of his own choosing but, like Aelred, Lewis recognizes God's place in it. He rephrases Christ's words to his disciples into an understanding that 'You have not chosen one another but I have chosen you for one another' (Lewis 1977, 83).

Lewis thus describes friendships, though seemingly casual in conception, as having their source in God. They all possess the potential to become very significant in practice. This concept is consistent with viewing the Levels of Friendship model as a continuum. A friendship may start as an Acquaintance but can progress to a Social Friendship or even to a Close or Intimate Friendship. The model also shows that the number of friends decreases as the level of depth increases, indicating that all relationships at the lower levels of friendship do not develop to the higher levels of friendship. But some do. Aelred and Lewis point out that friendships can be used by God for his purposes – quite beyond what the participants may realize is happening in the initial acquaintance.

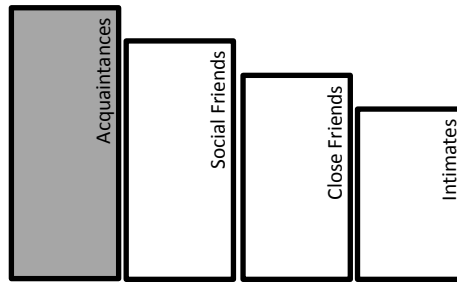
For Social Friends, the Facebook connection is important in a different way than it is for Acquaintances, for which it may be the only connection, or for Close Friends, who are more likely to communicate in other ways. Consistent with Lewis' descriptions of friendship, Social Friends share common interests and activities. Through Facebook, embodied sharing with Social Friends is augmented or perhaps even dominated by opportunities to be connected and share digitally. The Facebook link can serve as a means of disseminating information, invitations, and photos about and from events that involve Facebook-friends who are likely to see each other socially. Facebook interaction plays a role in enabling friendship to be apparent in making active responses in the lives of friends. Lindsey sees Facebook as very valuable in this respect:

Facebook makes me be a better friend because I can be more immediate, get in contact easier, quicker.

Understandings indicating that Facebook-friendships at the level of Social Friends are entered into or sustained to benefit the other, may demonstrate a theological understanding of friendship as a faithful response to Christ's command to love one another. However a large number of Social Friend connections, which is often the norm for young adult Christians, can significantly affect the investment of time in each relationship. It may be indicative of a theological perspective that does not privilege particularity but instead reflects a value for the possibilities made available by the quantity of interactions.

Social Friends, like-minded companions, or Carnal Friends all describe relationships based in shared pleasures. Lewis and young adult Christians recognize their value and can find theological justification for seeking them out, maintaining, and nurturing them, while remaining mindful of the danger of exclusivity (Lewis 1977, 112–127). Aelred cautions against investing time with relationships that could be better spent in fellowship with those who would together seek to grow as friends in Christ (Aelred 2008, 84). The Levels of Friendship model recognizes the significance of Social Friends for young adult Christians by interacting in a variety of ways that might allow them to better realize why God has placed them in relationship and provide opportunities to develop further as disciples and friends.

4.1.4 Unexpected gifts: Worldly Friendships and Acquaintances



The Levels of Friendship model indicates that most of the connections of young adult Christians on Facebook are actually just Acquaintances. This level of friendship is not only significant in size and in relation to the use of Facebook but theologically as well. The next section of this chapter will consider Acquaintances as the primary population in the Categories of Friends model, then in a theological understanding of friendship with neighbours. First we will again look to Aelred for his perspective on his third account of friendship, Worldly, as it correlates to the Acquaintance level of friendship.

Worldly Friendships are formed for utility or financial benefit (Aelred 2008, I.42–44). Aelred quotes the Wisdom literature when he describes this kind of friend as ‘... a fair-weather friend, and he will not abide in the day of your trouble’ (Aelred 2008, I.43 [Sir 6:8]). But because there is agreement in human matters and the friendship involves virtues such as hope (albeit for profit), cherishing faith (in reward), and providing a pleasing mutuality, it may lead ‘many individuals to a certain degree of true friendship ...’ (Aelred 2008, I.44). However, Billy notes the difference between a connection made for gain and an authentic friendship:

This kind of friendship ends when either person ceases to be advantageous to the other. It does not endure in times of trouble. Although Aelred admits that it may resemble true friendship somewhat, he insists that its primary concern for temporal advantage prevents it from being authentic. (Billy in Aelred 2008, 37)

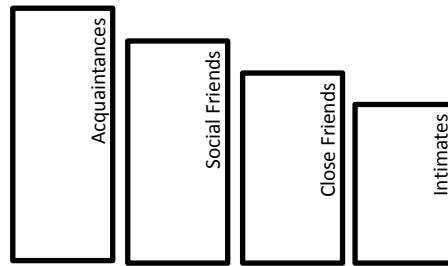
Aelred acknowledges that friendship does provide benefits but should not be formed on the basis of anticipation of benefits. Although a relationship that is of mutual benefit may appear acceptable, Paul Wadell shares Aelred’s concerns: ‘Instead of being focused on the needs of another, worldly friendships are “always full of deceit and intrigue” because a person must disguise the fact that he or she has little genuine regard for the one claimed as friend’ (Wadell 2008a, 32).

Western culture places value on connections, networks, and the benefits they offer. Relationships built on business and social connections are recommended, sought after, and expected. Social and philanthropic organizations recruit members based on criteria such as who the people are, as indicated by where they work, who they know and what they can contribute to the cause. Business networking organizations and sites, such as Rotary Clubs, Chambers of Commerce, and LinkedIn, offer the means to connect with others for the purposes of strengthening and extending existing contacts which may provide job or business opportunities. The term used on the LinkedIn website is 'Connections' and, according to the website, 'Relationships Matter'.³⁴ Similar to a Facebook-friendship, a 'connection' through the website implies trust and is a public affirmation of an association between two parties. Lest we think that connecting with another for possible gain is limited to business situations, Wadell asks, 'Aren't many of us at least occasionally tempted to seek out someone not because we really want a friendship with him or her, but because we suspect such an alliance might help us get ahead?' (Wadell 2008a, 32).

The context of Aelred's immediate audience may explain his attitude towards or warnings against Worldly Friendships he would have known from his days at court as well as from politics within the church. He would not have been able to imagine the possibilities for connections available to young adult Christians practising friendship in the 21st century. Thus it is not fair to either him or to contemporary young adults to presume that his advice regarding Worldly Friends or Acquaintances is directly intended for or relevant to the situation depicted in the Levels of Friendship model. But that both Aelred and the model recognize the reality of friendships of this type speaks to the importance of recognizing the theological dimensions of relationships and interactions with Acquaintances and will be considered in the context of friendship with neighbours.

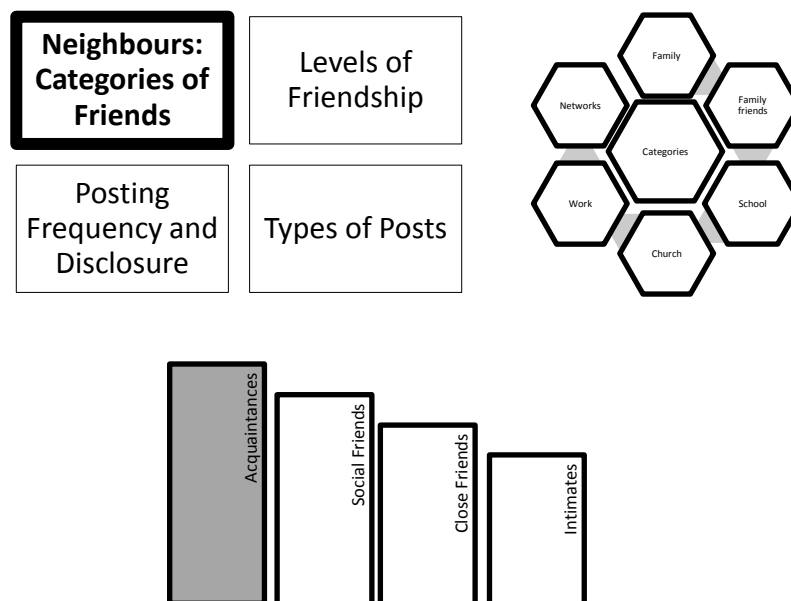
³⁴ LinkedIn. 2011. "World's Largest Professional Network." LinkedIn homepage, accessed October 14, 2011. <https://www.linkedin.com/>.

4.1.5 Section summary: *Theologically considering friends in the Levels of Friendship model*



Assumptions and values of the participants related to friends and friendship in the Levels of Friendship model are affirmed and challenged by, as well as themselves affirm and challenge, theological understandings. Classical ideas lay a foundation for understanding friendship not based on need or utility but as a gift from God. The gift allows friends to grow in goodness with each other, benefiting the greater good. Aelred and Lewis affirmed a Christian understanding of friends being brought together by God. While there was no explicit acknowledgement by the participants of God's role in the initiation of a friendship, there were indications that their assumptions and values recognize inherent worth in individuals and for friendships. For Aelred, authentic friendship for a Christian involves another Christian and Jesus. Lewis and the participants did not indicate that friendship for Christians was limited to other Christians. But if obedience to Christ and growing in faith is of primary interest to a Christian, friendships with other Christians will be a natural outcome of seeking to be friends with others of similar interests, aims, and pleasures. Practices of entering into Facebook-friendships do not include the consideration of criteria as advised by Aelred for Spiritual Friendships. They do have similarities to the mutual agreement of Social Friends, described by Lewis, and the willingness to engage with the other for the possibilities of developing the friendship. The model depiction of fewer relationships at deeper levels of friendship indicates understanding and willingness to value friends and invest increasing amounts of time and means of interaction in the relationships. Even with friendships of lesser depth, friendship practices on Facebook allow for active recognition and response to others. Practices in engaging and persistence of friendship at every level have purpose. Interactions at every level reflect assumptions and values of young adult Christians. The tension between the participants' assumptions and values and other theological understandings is recognized in the practices of friendship as inclusive, exclusive, and with particularity.

4.2 Neighbours – Categories of Friends model

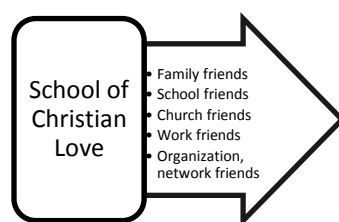


The term 'neighbour' is used here for Facebook-friends from any category who are identified primarily as Acquaintances in the Levels of Friendship model. They may be people recently met, known of through mutual friends, networks or associations, or people with whom a deeper friendship existed in the past. Participants discussed relying on Facebook to let people from all categories of association know of significant events as well as for staying informed in the lives of others in whom they maintain an interest. They expressed desire to have a connection but they did not consider most of them to really be 'friends'. Thus the number of Facebook-friends that are at the level of Acquaintance may be large but the emotional tie to the friendship is likely to be low and interaction is apt to be infrequent. Since a Facebook-friend link may be the only means of connection with an Acquaintance, Facebook is arguably of the most value for this level of friendship.

In the situational analysis, categorization of friends was considered in terms of the developmental stage and cultural constructs. Social capital theory explains the value of these types of associations and their potential to accrue benefits to the possessor of social connections. But what is not indicated in social capital theory is a reason for, or the worth of, the contribution that can be provided by the possessor of social capital to those with whom one is in relationship. That is, although social capital may be of benefit to the possessor of the social capital, the relationship can be of benefit to both parties for reasons other than related to social capital. A Christian imperative towards 'loving another as oneself' or being 'blessed to

be a blessing' to others, would look not just at the advantages to be gained by being in a friendship. It would also consider what could be offered to another person through the friendship. Theologies of friendship related to neighbours are more explicit than the assumptions and values interpreted through the fieldwork and situational analysis. As such, they can be helpful in prompting ways to consider friendship with others as teaching practices that are in obedience to God.

4.2.1 Friendship as a school for Christian love – Augustine



The impact of Augustine on the theology of Christianity, writing in the important era in the development of the church near the end of the third century, cannot be overstated. Born in North Africa to a Christian mother, he was a brilliant thinker who had a broad education in philosophy and taught rhetoric for a number of years in Italy before converting to Christianity. He returned to Africa, serving the church as a bishop and writing voluminously, explaining his understanding of the faith and Christian living.

He developed a theology of friendship that retains continuity with the Classical period as he struggled with reconciling his pre-conversion experiences of friendship with his later theological understandings. In this sense, his work is especially relevant for this study because as Steve Summers notes, 'Considering how Augustine appropriates and modifies this tradition is important, not least because it prefigures how the contemporary Church might rework current notions of friendship in its quest for reinvigorated community' (Summers 2009, 79). Augustine was such a powerful figure that his own experiences of friendship, particularly in his later life, are probably not typical; his theology has however been influential in the church.

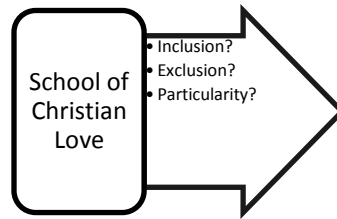
In his description of the Catholic Church as a spiritual City of God he distinguishes Christian life and relationships from those conducted in the material or Earthly City. His early friendships, and the pleasure they provided, contribute to some ambiguity as he sought to distinguish the difference in Christian friendships and those with others, both identified as *amicitia*. Augustine determined that perfect friendship is not only a gift of God. It is possible only through his help

and the charity of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the friends: 'No friends are true friends unless you, my God, bind them fast to one another through that love which is sown in our hearts by the Holy Ghost' (Augustine 1961, 75).

According to Augustine, in working towards true friendship in God we acknowledge the good in the individual. We find the potential to progress to a relationship that goes beyond kind regard towards one that is mutual, honest, and trusting. His premise leads to a view of friends supporting one another as they are walking together facing God, not each other. That was a significant image for centuries, particularly in the monastic tradition. Augustine came to believe that we cannot have this kind of friendship until we are eventually able to see the fullness of God in ourselves and others in heaven (*Commentary on the Letter of John to the Parthians* 10.3, see Burt 1999, 68). A vision that includes a fulfillment of friendship in heaven was beyond the scope of the friendship practices discussed by the young adult Christians in the fieldwork. Augustine however also recognized a 'functional' friendship that does not yet share a mutual love of God.

Augustine's writings can be interpreted in an understanding of friendship itself as a school of Christian love (Wadell 2008a, 29). Friends provide the means for and object of practising and demonstrating God's love. Friendships are the arena in which Christians learn how to represent God in the world. Within friendship, opportunities abound to demonstrate the fruits of the spirit: love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22–23). Friendship may be best realized between two Christians who share the same vision of God and his kingdom, as claimed by Aelred and Augustine. But young adult Christians may still be in 'school' in terms of learning through friendship, including via their interactions on Facebook. Considering friendship in terms of the opportunities it provides for learning and growing will help in wrestling with understanding what distinguishes Christian friendships and practices from those of others, or if there is a distinction. Conflicts related to theological values of inclusion, exclusion, and particularity are, again, among the issues that emerge from learning and practising friendship across categories of friends.

4.2.2 Challenging lessons: Inclusion, exclusions, particularity?



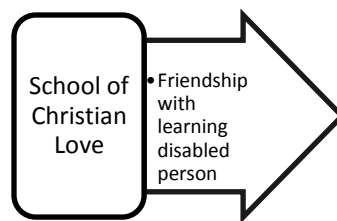
Augustine's emphasis on true friendship only being realized between two Christians suggests both exclusivity and particularity. His writings reveal his struggles in reconciling his early pre-Christian friendships with a theological approach to friendship. Similar struggles may also be recognized in young adult Christians' Facebook practices with neighbours or Acquaintances. They discuss and demonstrate inclusiveness by having large numbers of Acquaintances as Facebook-friends but by necessity their experiences of close friendship are limited to a small number. They claim to be particular, but not exclusive, in their close friendships while striving to be inclusive in response to a calling to care for God's creation. Assumptions and values on these questions are difficult to define. An example of this type of dilemma is exemplified in young adult Christians' discussions about others who are not on Facebook.

Because Facebook has become such a common means of communicating with friends for young adults, a danger of exclusion arises for those who choose not to participate on Facebook. Lindsey described an incident where she had extended invitations to an event through Facebook and later realized that the method of inviting people had excluded some friends who were not on Facebook. She said the situation was remedied when the omissions were discovered but the incident made her and her friends conscious of the realities of inclusion and exclusion on a digital media basis. Thus, although there was not a deliberate intention to exclude others due to non-participation in Facebook, the practice of issuing invitations on Facebook resulted in a practice inconsistent with a theology of inclusion.

Augustine's vision of friendships between Christians and perfection in a future state are challenging in an interpretation of particularity versus exclusivity. This vision should not diminish the reality of present relationships and their value. He indicates inclusion in an openness to friendship as duty and opportunity: 'It [friendship] must include all those to whom love and affection are due. It may go out more readily to some, more slowly to others, but it must reach even to our enemies for whom we are commanded to pray' (*Letter 130*, 13, quoted in Burt 1999, 67).

Jesus' own examples of friendship teach about realizing and accepting God's grace, then extending it to others. The incarnation itself exemplifies God's placing himself in friendship with the created being who is so other than the divine. Seeing Christ in others and learning how to love God through friends sharpens our view of Christ. This practice includes befriending the poor and marginalized or those Acquaintances that may not ever develop into the type of Christian friends that Augustine and Aelred describe. However, Swinton provides an example of practising friendship with a neighbour from a marginalized category that can further the education of friendship as a theological practice.

4.2.3 Practising the lessons learned: Friendship with a learning disabled person



Practising friendship with a neighbour outside of one's regular environment or someone different from oneself demonstrates inclusiveness in friendship and a positive example of the value in particularity. It requires opportunity and skills. As a practical theologian who advocates for the power of friendship in addressing the needs of intellectually disabled people, Swinton offers a model that teaches how friendship with a disabled neighbour can be undertaken. He describes a community humanized by friendship.

True Christian friendship is the physical manifestation of God's love, exemplified by Jesus' sacrificial all embracing friendship. It is through loving, meaningful friendships that intellectually disabled people can come to understand the meaning of Jesus as their friend. Within the context of community, friendship means equality, acceptance and genuine valuing. Friendship is not an intellectual matter. Friendship is a matter of the heart. (Swinton 2000b, 105)

In developing a relationship with an intellectually disabled person, Swinton emphasizes points that have bearing in the development of all friendships. Friendship relies on the freedom and mutuality of the participants. Both parties must desire the relationship. Real friendship cannot be imposed or result from a forced attitude towards another. The possibility of rejection is present in various stages of relationship between any two people. So it should not be

surprising that there is certainly a likelihood of rejection by a person with a disability when seeking to form a friendship. However, in explaining that refusal of a friendship by a disabled person may be a complex issue, Swinton argues that a Christian community should not allow it to result in rejection of the person. Instead, the community can forgive and show love for the individual. This requires persisting in identifying those whom God has called to befriend and to walk along with the one in need. Augustine described this walk when recognizing the gift of a special friend.

Those called into friendship with disabled people should demonstrate commitment to the individual within the disability by taking a share in their life and also sharing their own lives. Such a relationship is likely to be sacrificial in some respects. Note here that the benefit to both friends is quite different from the personal gain sought in the Worldly Friendship discussed by Aelred. In this example, followers are being obedient and responsive to Jesus' model of friendship. In so doing they are making known his kingdom in the world, while affirming the individuality and importance of each of God's precious children.

Although a friend may be a gift from God, Swinton points out that friendship is a learned skill. His model illustrates a method for developing friendship with a neighbour with whom we may think we have little in common, not identify with, and or perhaps even fear (Swinton 2000a). Acknowledging that friendship must begin with encounter, Swinton notes that friendships are much more likely to develop between people who have regular contact with each other, often regardless of their obvious differences. In this model, the intentional use of friendship to integrate a person with a disability into a Christian church community is accomplished through preparation in developing a relationship of trust with the person within the patient. The church is equipped through education, advocacy, and empowerment. The congregation learns how it is possible to move from admiring a worthy objective of offering kindness to understanding their own role in responding to Christ's call to care for a stranger. The model also includes building up a network of support involving others who participate by meeting specific needs. Swinton found that as the model was enacted in communities, the development of friendships was not as much the result of what a congregation did as of how the congregation was prepared to be when they were called upon to respond to difficulties inherent in relationships.

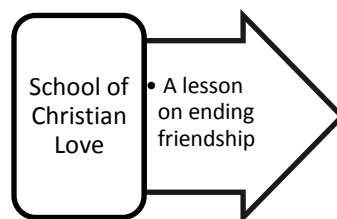
What was important was whether the community had absorbed the gospel *intrinsically* and sought to live that narrative out in its life and practice, or whether it

understood the biblical narrative *extrinsically* and sought to live out its existence as a closed community that, while being safe from “intruders,” was not necessarily faithful. (Swinton 2000a, 156)

This model is specific to the task of moving a person with mental health issues from hospital care into the community through the friendship found within a church. The principles provide a sound framework and teaching tool for Christians. It allows friendship to be a practical means of connecting with neighbours that reflects Christ’s message of reconciliation and hope for the world.

Adapting Swinton’s model to Facebook-friendship practices would require intentional use of Facebook as a tool to develop and nurture friendship, as opposed to merely providing a convenient means to be connected to numerous people. Christian Facebook-users would consciously prepare themselves to be in relationship with each person with whom they enter into a Facebook-friendship. A demonstration of the gospel would allow for friendship to be extended to others through Facebook. It would seek ways to respond to the gospel message through practices of friendship exhibited via the particular media. Swinton might challenge the use of Facebook in a closed context. Instead, he might encourage the use of it as a means of sharing the gospel message through preparation in offering friendship and handling complications inherent in the concepts of inclusion, exclusion and particularity of relationships.

4.2.4 Lessons on ending friendships: Aelred



Augustine presumes that true friendships grounded in common faith will not end except by loss of faith. For citizens of the City of God, ‘friends would rather see each other dead than have their friendship end’ (Augustine 1963, 19.8). Yet friendships do end in ways other than death and Aelred addresses quite practically how to respond when a friendship must be ended. According to Aelred, a friendship would need to be dissolved as a result of any of five

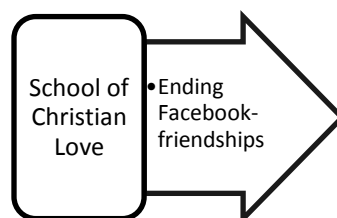
faults of a friend that he identifies as destructive to a friendship – upbraiding, reproach, pride, disclosing of secrets or a treacherous wound. He also adds a sixth reason to end a friendship:

... if your friend has injured those whom you are bound to love equally well, and if even after he has been called to task, he continued to be an occasion of ruin and scandal to those for whose well-being you are responsible, especially when the infamy of these crimes is damaging to your own good name. (Aelred 2008, III.46)

Yet even if a situation arises where a change is necessary for a reason other than one of the vices he specifies and the friendship must be ended, Aelred counsels withdrawing slowly and amicably. Cicero advises in *De amicitia* that ‘the wronged friend should honor the former friendship by refusing to do wrong in return.’ Aelred describes a Christian response that should go even further. He defines friendship containing four elements – love, affection, security, and happiness – and the dissolution of a friendship will only end three of the elements. He insists that love from a true friendship will remain beyond the termination of the friendship (Aelred 2008, III.51–52).

Functionally, deleting the Facebook connection to a Facebook-friend is a much simpler matter than the well-considered ending of a friendship as instructed by Aelred. The deletion of a Facebook-friend is not likely to be in regard to friendships at the same level as the friendship-ending described by Aelred. His advice can contribute a theological perspective which would challenge ending a friendship in haste or without cause. Using such caution could prevent injuring another or limiting the possibility for future opportunities to engage with the other and be a witness to faith in Christ.

4.2.5 Practising the lessons learned: Ending Facebook-friendships



Many of the participants indicated that they choose to manage the size or content of their Facebook-friend list by deletion, if they attempt to manage it at all, rather than in the process of extending or accepting a Facebook-friend request. Only one person suggested that if selectivity is used in adding Facebook-friends, there is no need to delete Facebook-friends.

Reasons given for deleting people from a Facebook friend list included:

- don't know what's going on in their life or don't care
- can't remember who they are
- added as friend only to avoid an awkward situation but don't want to maintain them on my list
- if they post obscenities or other types of things that I prefer not to see
- don't want to be seen as associated with them
- don't want parents or adult friends as Facebook-friends viewing my Facebook pages
- some people won't notice being deleted
- just to unclutter things

Participants who actively manage their Facebook-friend list through deletion may have revealed inconsistency in their assumptions and values. After indicating that they valued the individual by accepting or initiating Facebook-friendships, they later decided they no longer desired the connection and deleted it. Lauren was pragmatic about her Facebook-friend deletion practices, demonstrating tension between assumptions and values of friendship and values in other contexts, such as convenience or technical capability. It may also reflect consumerist attitudes extending even towards friendship. The Facebook-friendship connections that she valued at one time, ceased to be of importance to her when the category of the friendship was no longer current.

Lauren: If I don't talk to you on a regular basis, I'm not going to be your friend. Like I deleted 300 people after I graduated from High School. Then I deleted another 250 when I got to college.

Some of the participants choose to maintain Facebook-friendship in order to preserve the association, retain the possibility of being closer friends again, or because they do not want to risk hurting the feelings of a former friend by indicating through a Facebook-friend deletion that they no longer consider them a friend. Some said they simply saw no good reason to delete anyone from their list. The reluctance to delete a person as a Facebook-friend may be

indicative of their valuing each individual, maintaining relationships, and the importance of friendship – both past, current, and for the possibilities in the future. Will explained his rationale for his practice:

For the one or two interactions I may have in a year with someone I wouldn't otherwise be in contact with, and it really is only one or two per year, it's worth it to me to keep the contacts as friends on Facebook.

Other participants said that they have intended to review and delete people from their friend list but have not taken the time to do it. This response may also be revealing assumptions and values that recognize value at some level in retaining the connection, hence there is reluctance to end Facebook-friendships even when there is no expectation for the possibility of renewed connection. Or, it may be that they are not willing to spend time on a task that they do not consider important.

Although Hannah had earlier admitted to being Facebook-friends with people who were 'not really friends' but to whom she did not wish to be rude, she was adamant that she did not want to be associated with others who were rude. Her assumptions and values towards showing and expecting regard towards Acquaintances are consistent with her behaviour:

I delete people who make rude comments or remarks that make me feel uncomfortable. I don't want to get into a conversation with them over the internet, see it or be associated with it.

A few people discussed an experience of having been deleted from the friend list of an Acquaintance. Cassie was nonchalant describing her experience:

I wasn't aware (I had been deleted) but I tried to look someone up and I wasn't friends with them anymore. I wasn't upset.

Others in the focus group concurred that they had shared the same experience and response. Two participants described being a part of a group of co-workers who were deleted by a Facebook-friend after an incident or 'drama' within the group. Although the Facebook-friendship had been deleted, interest and concern for the former Facebook-friend remained, evidenced by continuing to seek information about her through other Facebook connections. But no personal attempt at reconciliation was made. It was presumed that the ending of the

digital connection marked the end of that relationship. This perhaps indicated that without Facebook the participants did not know how to persist in friendship in this particular situation.

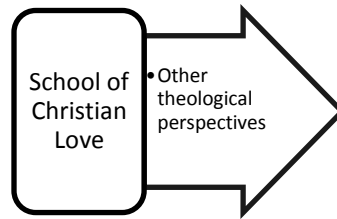
A few discussions of Facebook-friend deletions related to friendships at deeper levels of friendship. There were examples of when being deleted as a Facebook-friend was difficult. Callie reported being deleted by a good friend from a prior year. She said she could not figure out why her friend had deleted her. As in the previous example, although she maintained an interest in her former friend she had not attempted to make contact outside of Facebook. She admitted:

I still like to check on her through other friends who still are friends [with her] on Facebook.

In this instance, the deletion was personally felt as a loss of relationship, not just a digital connection. In contrast to the comments of those who did not regret the ending of Facebook-friendships with Acquaintances, the responses described here are ones that valued the terminated relationships. The relationships that underlie the digital connection may be more meaningful than acknowledged in the fieldwork. This justifies a call for further reflection by the participants on the connection between their Facebook, friendship and faith practices.

Activities involving ending Facebook-friendships are examples of ways that young adult Christians learn and practise friendship using Facebook. Explanations of reasons for deleting or not deleting Facebook-friends and reactions to being deleted reflect influences of social and technological contexts. Those contexts may create and respond to desire for, and expectation of, connection and convenience. Yet deeper understandings of relationship are involved in assumptions and values reflecting theologies of inclusion, exclusion, and particularity in friendship. Facebook-friend deletion practices of young adult Christians can be interpreted as expressions of theological positions on a number of issues. These include the worth of the other as God's creation, an understanding of friendship, the value placed on friendship in general, and on Facebook-friendships in particular. The variety of descriptions of how Facebook-friend deletions are practised indicates that the theology behind the behaviours and reactions related to Facebook-friend deletion is not consistent among participants. It may not even be well-defined or consistent within individuals as they continue to experience Facebook and friendship practices as learning situations.

4.2.6 Continuing education: Other theological perspectives



The theologies of friendship considered thus far are based in traditional understandings, doctrine, and structures of Western society and denominational church organization. Theologies may involve difficult ecclesiastical terminology and conceptualizations but the young adult Christians in this study will likely be familiar with traditional concepts even if they have not considered them personally or they are not demonstrated in their own practices. Theological approaches to friendship of some other theologians recognize and reject the hierarchical, patriarchal structure of Christianity and Western society that are familiar to the participants of this study. Latin American Catholics began considering theology in the 1960s based on their very real experiences of injustice, poverty and death. Encouraged by the Second Vatican Council, other laity began exploring and expressing theology based on their experiences of the world and placed their emphasis on equality and justice for all living creatures. Liberation, Feminist, and Gay theologies are important theological interpretations in the contemporary world. Although the young adult Christians in this study may not have yet been exposed to theological perspectives outside their own churches or Christian groups, other ways of thinking theologically about friendship should be made available to them.

When Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel observes diminishing family ties and norms, she sees diverse kinds of groups of friends moving in beside or substituting for family or the hierarchical structures of the church (Moltmann-Wendel 2000). Beginning with an image of God as friend, she explores other biblical images of Jesus as friend, the Last Supper as a meal of friendship, and Jesus' friend Mary Magdalene. From these she is able to 'rediscover' friendship in other aspects of relationship. This includes how women naturally take a part in and communicate with each other, through the experience of connectedness in touch, in the recognition of the role of one's body in stimulating awareness, and in acknowledgement of the earth as a living force.

By focusing on Jesus' life rather than his death, she views the crucifixion as self-surrender instead of sacrifice. Positioning the Last Supper as a meal of friendship changes it to a

celebration of the ritual rather than an atmosphere of mourning, death, and sin (Moltmann-Wendel 2000, 43). She explores the friendship of Jesus and Mary Magdalene to demonstrate how conventional understandings of sin can be harmful to friendships. Instead, she offers a model of Mary Magdalene for a church going forward. The characteristics of that vision of the church have the message of the resurrection being handed on through women's hearts, hands, and heads, in a feeling of closeness to – not distance from – God. A hierarchical or paternalistic model for the church is changed to one of friends caring for each other amidst diversity and differences (Moltmann-Wendel 2000, 83–84).

A lesbian and gay theology of relationships is explored by Elizabeth Stuart. It is her contention and experience that committed sexual relationships of lesbian and gay people are understood best in terms of friendship. She reviews understandings of friendship through the centuries and, while noting changes, finds that they agree on equality of power in the relationship. Although acknowledging theoretical support for such a view, she would likely argue against Aristotle's ordering of friendship, Aelred's belief in friendship as the means of attaining friendship with God, and Lewis' insistence that friendship is noble because it is not necessary. Instead she gives examples of unlikely but incredibly strong friendships that emerged, thrived, and provided vision for survival (Stuart 1995, 46–49). These friendships are possible because there is another with whom a merging of self or soul can develop. She laments that is often not the case for many gay people who may not have a strong sense of self as defined in terms of others. Teachings of Christianity regarding sacrifice of the self thus ask for something that they may have been unable to develop through relationships (Stuart 1995, 49). Compassion, negotiation, and balancing of friendships are vital to being a friend for the Church she defines as 'a coalition of justice-seeking friends working to incarnate the passion of God between selves and in the world' (Stuart 1995, 231).

The theology of liberationist, feminist theologian Carter Heyward describes God as the power existing in and extending into all parts of the created universe. Her views could be disorientating yet her writing on her own experiences of friendship bridges the gap between theoretical and personal practices. She experienced and chronicled a therapy relationship in which she felt a deep spiritual connection and continuously sought realization of a friendship (Heyward 1993). Although her book describing her experience was controversial, the spirituality within friendship that she experiences may have been what Aelred described in a

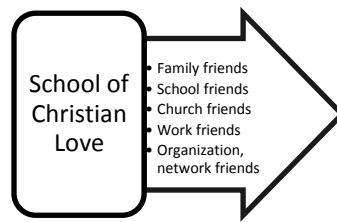
Spiritual Friendship. Yet her conception of God is very different from that of Aelred's understanding of God, immersed as he was within the patriarchal structure she rejects.

Throughout her book, Heyward does describe friends based on categories including contexts of association, profession, sexual orientation, and faith. These various relationships she mentions through the course of her experience and healing are significant in different ways. This confirms understandings of friendships by categories and at different levels as identified in this study. Stuart also concurs with findings from the data as she recognizes theological significance in multiple friendships.

The most important advantage of the theology of friendship is that it is inclusive – it can include within it lesbian and gay relationships, marriages, heterosexual cohabitation and the experience of single and celibate people. We can all have friends, and all friendships are embodied and expressions of our passion. (Stuart 1995, xv)

These examples of theologies of friendship represent theological considerations of friendship in ways that were not discussed by the young adult Christians describing their practices through Facebook. The importance of embodiment in friendships described by Moltmann-Wendel is not experienced through Facebook-friendship practices enacted strictly on-line. The possibilities provided by touch and the mutual celebration of rituals are not carried through as a part of the practices available on Facebook. Although Facebook appears to operate outside of hierarchical structures, it is nonetheless a product of a system built on and entrenched in traditions of power and, some (including Stuart and Heyward) might say, oppression. Facebook is limited to those privileged with the resources to acquire the technology and devices, as well as those who are able to allocate time to practising friendship through digital devices. For those who are privileged with the resources, Facebook offers the opportunity for immediate connection with others with whom physical touch and sharing is not currently possible. The possibilities for developing the closeness to each other and to God in friendship that these theologians describe requires more than a Facebook connection. Yet there could be a role for it as a tool in establishing and maintaining a connection that the hearts, hands, and heads can sustain. Heyward's, Stuart's and Moltmann-Wendel's discoveries and theologies of friendship are not hierarchical or structured as depicted in two of the research models (Levels and Categories of Friendship) but have correspondence to the relational aspects of the other two models (Type of Posts and Posting Frequency and Disclosure).

4.2.7 Section summary: *Theologically considering neighbours in the Categories of Friends model*

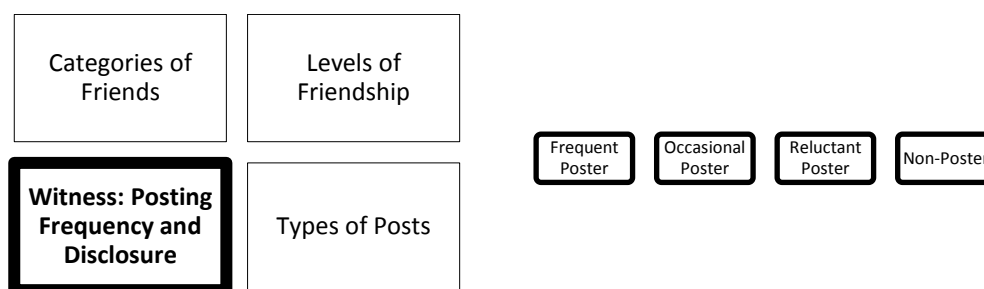


Friendship as a school of Christian love offers lessons and provides opportunities for practising the lessons learned as assumptions and values are embodied and reflected on. Assumptions and values of the participants related to friendship with neighbours in the Categories of Friendship model are both resonant with and dissonant to other theologies of friendship in this exploration. Augustine's ideal and future vision for friendship is not bound by the realities of the present, where young adult Christians are engaging in friendship. It can be difficult to apply in practice. Recognition of friends as gifts from God, as a part of a vision for fulfillment of the kingdom of God, or in exclusivity of Christians as friends, was not explicitly heard from the participants. Evidence of the tension is manifested in the difficulty in reconciling theological understandings of inclusion, exclusion, and particularity in practising friendship. Young adult Christians profess and demonstrate inclusion in their Facebook practices with acquaintances. This may be reflecting a theological understanding of the universal nature of God's love. Particularity is evidenced in choices made to befriend in difficult situations. Exclusion may be evidenced in practices of formation of groups or may unintentionally occur through the issuance of invitations which do not extend to those not on Facebook.

Assumptions and values revealed in friendship practices related to the deletion of Facebook-friends are not consistent among young adult Christians. The theology of valuing the individual through entering into a Facebook-friendship, is contradicted by casual deletion without cause. Such actions run counter to Aelred's careful consideration in ending friendships, however he is only addressing friendships at the level of a Spiritual Friendship. Young adult Christians who maintain the connections to honour the feelings of the other, respect the connection, or anticipate possibilities for the relationship in the future, demonstrate their assumptions and values. Young adult Christians who delete Facebook connections may also be indicating the importance they place on friendship by focusing their connections more purposefully. Either course could result from theological reflection.

Young adults continue to develop their theological responses to these issues when challenged to reflect on their Facebook, friendship and faith practices in relation to each other. Swinton’s practical model of preparing for and entering into friendship as well as reflection on diverse theological perspectives, such as liberationist and feminist, provide lessons for consideration of practices. These theologies can influence further development of practices that connect in expression of responding to a calling to obedience to Christ.

4.3 Witness – Posting Frequency and Disclosure model



The Posting Frequency and Disclosure model describes Facebook-friends revealing themselves and discerning information about each other. This occurs through initiated posts and responses to posts, at all levels of posting frequency including non-posting. In the situational analysis, the Posting Frequency and Disclosure model was considered in relation to theories of identity and disclosure. In a theological analysis, people who are posting more frequently on Facebook may be offering more opportunities for their faith and witness to Christ to be revealed. But even posting less frequently or not at all can reveal values and assumptions as well as free up time for occasions to practise Christian friendship in other ways. The fieldwork provided examples of participants who disclosed their faith through proclamation on Facebook and others who witnessed to Christianity through references, activities, and in a holistic presentation of themselves. Assumptions and values in these practices will be considered in examining how Jesus revealed himself to and made friends of his disciples.

4.3.1 Disclosure and sharing: Christ as the source of Christian friendship

In addition to disclosing himself through creation, in the Old Testament God speaks and appears to people at times and in ways of his choosing. In order to make himself known to the world, he calls a people to be his own, through whom he will bless all nations. In the New Testament, God discloses himself through his incarnation in Christ. Scripture writers and theologians convey the importance of disclosure to relationship in Christianity based on Jesus’

interaction with and teaching to his disciples. A Christian understanding of friendship includes the text of John 15 along with other scriptural references and demonstrations of friendship.

Jesus demonstrated, in word and deed, the love God has for his creation, the length to which he is willing to go to redeem humanity from sin, and his desire for humans to care for and love each other. Jesus uses 'my friends' in addressing his disciples (Luke 12:4), is called a friend of tax collectors and sinners (Matt 11:19; Luke 7:34), and speaks of friends in his teachings (Luke 11:5–8; 15:6–9; 16:9). The importance of relationship with both God and others is made clear in Jesus' restating of the Law and in his command regarding friendship in John 15:12–17:

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other.

The young adult Christians involved in this study are likely to be familiar with this passage, perhaps more than any other, in terms of a scriptural reference to friendship. They are also likely to read a 21st century North American/European understanding of 'friend' into their interpretation of John 15 as they reflect on how it is applicable to their own Christian friendship practices. Historical and cultural contexts of the passage are important. Insight from biblical hermeneutical processes will provide a stronger basis for connecting it to contemporary interpretations of the scripture.

The Book of Acts describes a community coming together and forming relationships across social and economic divides through a common response to Jesus' life, death, and teachings.³⁵ In Acts 2:44–47 and 4:32–37, Luke discusses practices within the community that could be considered either communistic or idealized, perhaps both and certainly counter-cultural. Alan Mitchell suggests that interpreting the passages as only a utopian vision of the early church undermines the practical value of Luke's use of friendship traditions to unify the community across social lines. Luke does this, according to Mitchell, 'by suggesting how Lucan Christians

³⁵ Texts describing this period that provided background include: Arterbury 2005; Esler 2005; Guthrie 1970; Neufeld and DeMaris 2010.

can become friends across status divisions, thereby suspending the normal conventions of friendship in their day' (Mitchell 1992, 259). This was exemplified in the expectation for the wealthy to share their resources to benefit others. These practices linked the Christian community to the Deuteronomic tradition of eliminating need in Israel and reinterpreting the meaning of benefiting friends in the Greco-Roman tradition (Mitchell 1992, 269). The description of Christians from different statuses sharing in the community through hospitality and giving, suggests the applicability of the practice as an example of other aspects of Christian life. It illustrates the redefining of conventions on friendship practices based on circumstances and cultural expectations.

Chapters 15–17 are positioned in John between the narrative of the Last Supper and the arrest of Jesus in chapter 18, suggesting that they could be considered as an alternative 'last discourse' to chapter 14 (Barrett 1967, 392). C. K. Barrett explains verses 15:12–17 as integrally connected to the verses that immediately precede it, using symbolism of Jesus as the true vine, rather than Israel. The interpretation of the passage as part of a final discourse supports the view that the symbolism used is both Eucharistic and refers to a union of believers with Christ in his death: 'Only in Christ can Christians live. In him there is the fruitfulness of true service to God, of answered prayer, and of obedience in love. All who are in him are his friends, and they are necessarily united with each other in love' (Barrett 1967, 393).

The commandment expressed and described in John 5: 12–14 sums up the ministry of Jesus. It includes his glorification in death as the service of love between Christians. Verse 15 indicates that Jesus has revealed all that he has learned from his Father in order that they might understand and be called friends, rather than servants. Then there is a reminder that the friendship is the result of Jesus' choosing of them to bear lasting fruit and giving them his name to use in effective prayer. The passage is summed up by repeating the command to love one another.

From passages in John, we can understand Jesus' practical model of friendship in two ways, according to the analysis of Gail O'Day (O'Day 2008). Jesus' whole life has been a revealing of who he is as the Son of God, and an incarnation of friendship. In his death, he makes the ancient ideal of sacrifice for a friend a reality. Jesus' teachings recorded in John, specifically in John 10 when he uses different ways of describing who he is and what he has come to do, foreshadow what he is ultimately willing to do for his friends. His actions at his arrest and

death (John 18–19) demonstrate that his promise is true and that he can be relied upon. And in commanding that his followers love as he loved, he is telling us that his kind of love is also possible for us.

The commandment to love as Jesus has loved may be the most radical words of the Gospel because it claims that the love that enabled Jesus to lay down his life for his friends is not unique to him. This love can be replicated and embodied over and over again by his followers. To keep Jesus' commandment is to enact his love in our own lives. (O'Day 2008, 23)

O'Day explains the sacrificial love of Christ is an example to be emulated by commitment to our friend; emulation of the deed itself is not what is required. Jesus demonstrates friendship not just as a theory but as a practice and calls his disciples to do the same. This recognizes that the living out of friendship can be enacted in ways other than by the sacrifice of one's life. This is a useful perspective for reminding us that it is possible, even commanded, that Christians demonstrate by their actions the love that Jesus shows for his friends. We must be cautious to not minimize the redemptive value of Christ's sacrifice in extrapolating it only as an example of willingness to do all for a friend. God's love and provision of the means for each person and for all humanity to be restored through the life and death of his Son is the larger context within which Christians are able to engage in friendships.

In O'Day's analysis, a second aspect of the practice of friendship in the John 15 passage comes with the removal of the conditional 'if' from verse 14 to 15. Jesus makes the disciples his friends through the sharing of everything he has learned from God in honest speech or disclosure. O'Day explains that this is not the same as when someone speaks out to say something that they think another person needs to hear or to get their own point of view across. It is rather speaking from a horizontal position of friendship, intimacy, and trust – of transformative love. In sharing completely with the disciples, through acts such as the washing of their feet, Jesus physically moves himself from the position of master: 'He has led them into the mysteries of God, in action and in word. In the foot washing, Jesus gives the disciples something – a share with him – and that share with Jesus is what makes any subsequent acts of service and friendship possible for the disciples' (O'Day 2008, 26).

Again, it is something that Jesus has done in his complete sharing that has changed the relationship and made the disciples into friends. Swinton explains it in the following way:

‘Friendship encapsulates something of the mystery of the incarnation and points towards the one who moved the status of his followers from servants to friends; from its to thous’ (Swinton 1999, 27). Thus, in both the act of his willing sacrifice and in the making of friends of his disciples, we find that Jesus is the source for the friendships. He declares that it is feasible for us to participate in the type of friendship he demonstrates.

Examples in Jesus’ own life confirm that disclosure can occur through various methods but revelation and understanding are essential to friendship. A theological perspective of friendship is based on Christ’s example of revelation of himself and of putting himself in a position for lateral sharing with his disciples and friends. It lends greater significance to practices of young adult Christians on Facebook. In the demonstration of assumptions and values, Christian identity or witness is shared with friends on Facebook. It is made known through posted actions and activities as well as through explicit statements. In some instances during his ministry Jesus concealed his identity. O’Day’s analysis of Jesus’ disclosure and sharing with his friends does not discuss ways in which Christ may have been disclosing himself even in instances when he did not appear to be engaging with others. That is an aspect of disclosure that is represented in the model by the Non-Poster.

4.3.2 Disclosure and sharing of faith: Facebook activity

As in the early Christian church described in Acts, connections on Facebook can offer opportunities for disclosure and cut across divisions that might otherwise prevent the possibility for friendship. Comments made during the fieldwork show the participants’ awareness that they are revealing themselves as Christians on Facebook in a variety of ways. They are thus affirming a practice of proclaiming Christ in their words and actions which is a witness to their Facebook friends. Some examples were provided in response to a question of whether the participant thought it was apparent from their Facebook activity that they were a Christian.

Fran: It’s not intentional but maybe more as a byproduct of things I post. Twenty five, maybe 30 percent of what I post is overt but I think it is pretty obvious to anyone who follows me.

Fran’s assumption that her identity as a Christian emerges from the activities displayed and posts made, imply that they are a natural part of who she is and how she communicates. It is not necessary for her to flag it up or point it out to her Facebook-friends. Sarah similarly

discussed that she recognizes that although she is ‘not overtly posting about God’, her updates, posts and pictures ‘give clues’ to how she lives her life. The activities and groups she mentions reveal her Christian affiliations. By ‘giving clues’ she is witnessing in a way that is indirect yet available to those who take notice. This is a practice of witness to friends which may reflect a characteristic of reserve dominating an imperative to make disciples.

Anne said that she uses the ‘Like’ feature for items that are obviously Christian, a digital witness of affirmation and identification with the ‘Liked’ items. Luke described an incident when a Facebook-friend had replied to something he posted (he did not describe the post) asking Luke if he were a Christian. Luke had not mentioned that he was a Christian in the post. He found this to be a positive affirmation of the possibilities and power of witness through his everyday activities. The theology of friendship evidenced in these comments, along with others noted later in this section, is one of allowing disclosure of self through day-to-day activity to reflect the participants’ faith and is evidence of connection of practices. Every young adult Christian interviewed seemed comfortable knowing that they were professing their faith with their Facebook-friends in this manner.

Restraint in witness was also indicated, which may result in witness being less obvious. There are many instances when God’s revelations of himself are incomprehensible by even his own people, much less to those who are blind to him or whose hearts are hardened. It is often necessary to be intentional in witness and some of the participants make it more apparent that they are Christian or have religious beliefs through their profile information or posts.

4.3.3 Revealing through posting a religious view: As described

Some, but certainly not all, of the young adult Christians interviewed for this project said they use the word ‘Christian’ or identified their denomination as their ‘Religious Views’ on their Facebook profile. Also mentioned were references to a scripture, a descriptive label, a quote, or text as indicators of Christian faith provided in Facebook profiles. Megan said she simply posts ‘Romans 10’ to encourage people to look up the scripture reference. This practice could be seen as a ‘clue’ where further investigation on the part of an interested Facebook-friend would be required to learn what Megan is revealing about her beliefs. In contrast, Sarah said that she uses the very direct term ‘Jesus Follower’ to describe herself in her profile.

Some participants said that they consciously avoided using a Christian reference as their Religious View but made statements that they hoped indicated that they had religious beliefs.

Brent's profile reference to his religion is, 'If you can't tell, there is no point in me telling you. It would just be empty words.' He explained,

I like avoiding using it [a Facebook status] as my digital polemic against the godlessness of the world. ... When you use a platform like your Facebook profile it's like a signpost, it's not like a phone call ... two directional.

Lauren said that she states her Religious Views on Facebook with the phrase 'Don't have all the answers and don't pretend to.' These examples of Facebook profile statements invite further discussion – based on looking to scripture, understanding who is being followed and why, admission of uncertainty, and desire to live consistent with beliefs. They demonstrate theological approaches of sharing with and respecting friends in regard to matters of faith. It is not a theology that expects all friends to have the same beliefs but one that invites exploration and discussion among friends, privileging behaviour over words within friendship.

4.3.4 Revealing through posting a religious view: As observed

A reference to Christianity or a traditional denomination appeared on approximately 50 percent of the profiles of young adult Christians whose Facebook pages were made available to the researcher. The Religious View on the Facebook-profile page of some of the young adult Christians made reference to religious belief without identifying specifically as a Christian or a member of a denomination. Examples of these are: 'Grace and glory', 'If lovin' the Lord is wrong, I don't wanna be right', 'Presbytanglican with Forsythian leanings'. Posts of this type may indicate a desire to differentiate oneself from traditional groups in an idiosyncratic way. This is an interesting example of self-expression within the Christian context that may be driven by an inclination towards prizing individualism over identification with traditional Christian labels. Because it occurred in the profiles of a relatively small number of observed Facebook-profiles, it will be noted as a possible topic for further analysis but not as a significant practice within this study.

Approximately 15 percent of the young adult Christian Facebook-friends of the researcher were observed to post a statement or 'Favorite Quotation' on their Facebook Wall in addition to, or instead of, a Religious View, that could be interpreted as reflective of their theology. It was not possible to determine the intent of the person in choosing and posting them on Facebook. The following are examples of this practice:

Tracy: My God is an awesome God!

Abby: So thankful for the life God has given me.

Caleb: “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” (John 1:5)

Many of the young adult Christian Facebook-friends of the researcher posted as a favorite quote(s) on Facebook a literary or pop culture reference. This practice perhaps indicates a theology of witness to friends that provides a holistic view of themselves. Most of the group of young adult Christians whose Facebook pages are accessible to the researcher did not make a reference to God or their faith on their Profile section of Facebook. This may indicate a theology of friendship that does not seek to explicitly reference issues of faith in a non-dialogical manner as described earlier by Brent.

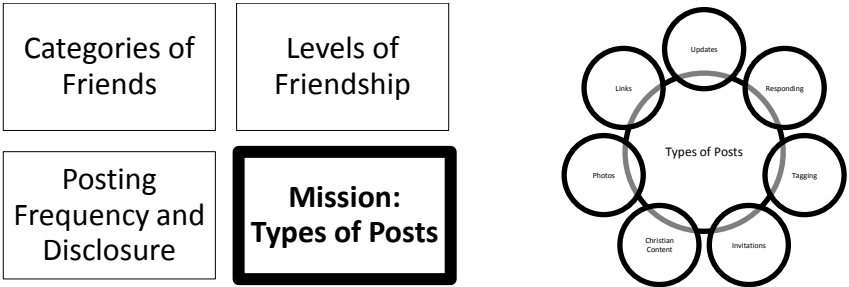
It may be a stretch to find that young adult Christians are consciously mirroring Jesus’ methods of both revealing and obscuring his identity during the time of his ministry. But there is a discernable practice of allowing Christian identity to surface on a Facebook through word and deed, or posts and actions, rather than only by profession as witness to friends. If Facebook is ubiquitous to this generation, young adult users are likely very proficient in presenting themselves as they wish to be understood and in interpreting the communications of their Facebook-friends in astute ways.

4.3.5 Section summary: *Theologically considering witness in friendship in the Posting Frequency and Disclosure model*

Assumptions and values of the participants related to friendship in witness in the Posting Frequency and Disclosure model are considered with respect to theological understandings of God revealing himself to his creation and Jesus’ making friends of his disciples. Because the participants are from various denominations and para-church organizations, scripture provides a common foundation for theology in this study. Studying John 15:12–17 and exploring the context of the early church offer a scriptural voice to a discussion of young adult Christians practising friendship as witness on Facebook. Witnessing may not be considered ‘politically correct’ but being counter-cultural is characteristic of the teachings of Jesus and the activities of the early Christian church. The theology represented by O’Day’s analysis of Jesus’ interactions in disclosing himself to and sharing himself as an equal among friends affirms a

value in disclosure and egalitarianism through Facebook-friendship practices as identified in the model. Friendship practices on Facebook correspond with early Church practices of demonstrating faith through friendships that crossed social divides. They are challenged by aspects of some theological understandings in their reluctance to ‘overtly’ identify their faith. The Posting Frequency and Disclosure model demonstrates that regardless of the frequency of posting practised by a young adult Christian, a Facebook presence and activities can witness to a faith in Christ and enable the opportunity to respond to or be available for meeting the needs and sharing the joys of friends. Young adult Christians believe that their faith is revealed through their interactions and sharing of interest and activities on Facebook and in so doing indicate values and assumptions that actions are the true demonstration of faith. Their willingness to allow their Christian identity to be disclosed to friends on Facebook, whether overtly or not, could be seen as affirming that their faith is integral to who they are and can be as a friend. The words and actions of young adult Christians acknowledge that the purposes for most Facebook practices are not conducted with the intention of identifying themselves as Christians. It is clear that some of the behaviours they exhibit on Facebook such as indicating that they are a Christian, groups they associate with, posting faith related topics, responding or asking for prayer, are consistent with practices of witness and, perhaps, mission which is the topic of the next section.

4.4 Mission – Types of Posts model



Young adult Christians communicate with others through Facebook using a variety of methods. In the situational analysis chapter the Types of Posts model was understood in terms of the convenience desired in a consumer culture. In this section we will focus on the theological significance of practices related to types of posts utilized by young adult Christians on Facebook by considering friendship as mission. This concept will be explored by first considering a theology of friendship with God. Examples of mission in friendship are demonstrated through hospitality and inter-religious friendship. Facebook and friendship

practices of the participants demonstrate acts of mission that have both resonance and dissonance with theologies of friendship.

4.4.1 Friendship with God: Beginning of mission

God's initiation of relationship with his creation was the initial act of mission. The idea of friendship with God did not emerge from the fieldwork but is an important concept in the theology of Thomas Aquinas and fundamental to recognizing how mission can be expressed through friendship. In *Summa Theologia*, the dialogue format is again used to explore friendship as Aquinas creates a dialogue with Aristotle and Augustine. Classical texts are also foundational to his views on friendship but lead him in a different direction from Augustine's theological understanding of friendship. Augustine's emphasis on exclusively Christian friendship and his vision of ultimate fulfillment of friendship only occurring in God's presence could be understood to limit the expectations for friendship in this life. Aquinas explores the possibility of more types of friendship than the ones of utility, pleasure and goodness identified by Aristotle and developed theologically by Aelred. His focus on *caritas* (or charity) as it extends to all is the love that makes friendship with God not only possible but integral to relationship with God. It is the foundation from which all other relationships can develop (Summers 2009, 86).³⁶ Aquinas' high regard for friendship is described is revealed through his statement describing God as 'our chief friend' (Aquinas, *Summa Theologia*, II-II:27.8.2).

Although for Aquinas an important aspect of God's love involves the equality expressed in John 15:15, he is careful not to diminish the otherness of God in the friendship aspect of the relationship. The friendship possible with God is based in God's grace, made available through the Holy Spirit. Aquinas' theology of friendship recognizes the inevitability of dissimilarity, misunderstanding, and inequality between friends. A life lived in friendship with God, as described by Aquinas, expands to the world in the activities that allow friendship with God to be offered to and shared with others. As God reached out to us, Christ made us his friends, and as the Spirit continuously befriends, the life of friendship with God calls us to move outward. Wadell explains, 'Like the divine love, our love too is to burst open to include the different and the disagreeable, the hostile and the strange, because in Christ God befriends us all' (Wadell 2008b, 40). Theologies of mission in friendship as a result of friendship with God can be understood through demonstrations of hospitality, which is a familiar concept for

³⁶ Another significant contributor to understanding Aquinas' writing on friendship is Schwartz 2007.

young adult Christians, and in inter-religious friendships for which opportunities may be increased as a result of Facebook.

4.4.2 Friendship as mission: Hospitality

Luke Bretherton points out that Christians are familiar with living both among others and in between times (Bretherton 2006). In this life the Spirit is at work restoring and transforming creation, while awaiting full restoration and transformation at Christ's return. He argues that '... the result of Christians self-consciously living between this age and the next is that they are marked off from non-Christians, not by race, or culture, or even by religious practice, but by their union with Christ whose ascension marks a relativization of this age and the inauguration of the new age' (Bretherton 2006, 121).

This position is useful for dealing with both the similarities and the differences between Christian and non-Christian moral and social practices, including those enacted through Facebook. The model he suggests for starting a dialogue as an act of mission is one of hospitality rather than mere tolerance.

The motif of hospitality works well, according to Bretherton, because '... it allows for Christians to retain their specific criteria for evaluating the veracity of moral claims, while at the level of moral practice experiencing both continuity and discontinuity with their neighbours' (Bretherton 2006, 128). Acknowledging that the understanding of hospitality differs according to culture and tradition, he assesses the concept within scripture, Christian tradition and as Christian witness, then uses that conception of hospitality as a vehicle for mission.

Bretherton points to examples of hospitality to friends, visitors, and enemies in scripture. Hospitality in scripture is sometimes offered and at times commanded. Abraham and Sarah graciously offer food and respite to their three visitors in Genesis 18. God commands hospitality to strangers in Leviticus 19:33–34. Instructions to leave gleanings in the field for those in need are a demand for hospitality (Deut 24:19–22). Jesus offered hospitality to those from whom people generally tried to keep separate: sinners, the unclean, pagans. In so doing, he used hospitality as a demonstration of holiness. In the parable of the Great Banquet, Jesus demonstrates mission through hospitality (Luke 14:15–24):

The church is to participate actively in the life of the world as slaves and envoys of the true King, in a manner akin to Jesus, extending an invitation to those, like they were

previously, who are not worthy guests, who are marginalized in the wider society, who do not consider themselves invited, and who have not even heard there is such a banquet available. Some will reject the invitation, others will accept, and some will need encouragement to believe that such an invitation includes them. (Bretherton 2006, 135)

From the Book of Acts, Bretherton provides examples of hospitality in the Christian community based on the early Christians' understanding of being guests of God and recipients of his extravagant hospitality through Jesus. He points out that Christian hospitality is more than entertaining but involves accommodating in a way that may require adaptation by the host. He provides examples ranging from the Rule of St Benedict through situations within modern conflicts and care of those with disabilities to demonstrate how hospitality should shape a Christian response as mission to neighbours and strangers.

Extending hospitality as mission in friendship practices may be occurring through Facebook. The temporality of the medium or the strength of the connection should not be a deterrent to friendship for Christians who are accustomed to living between the ages. Understanding hospitality towards others as the holiness demonstrated in both the Old and New Testaments allows Christians to embrace the concept. Openness to others is demonstrated first in the willingness to enter into the Facebook friendship, reflecting the unmerited welcome and friendship shown to us by God. As the connection continues, a theology of mission in friendship is demonstrated through outreach and responses to others. These are both experienced and observed by offering accommodation and making adaptations consistent with Christian principles.

4.4.3 Friendship as mission: Inter-religious friendships

Another example of moving beyond a general understanding of the importance of offering hospitality as mission in friendship is the practice of entering into friendship with an individual who professes another faith. Such an individual might be considered an enemy. Yet Moltmann-Wendel informs us that 'in Hebrew thought the opposite of friend is not enemy but stranger' (Moltmann-Wendel 2000, 6–7). This understanding allows us to approach others without hostility and attempt to replace prejudice with curiosity. James L. Fredericks addresses the topic of Christian action towards neighbours in a society of religious pluralism (Fredericks 1998). He suggests that inter-religious friendship can be a new theological virtue. Instead of

just promoting a general love for all humanity, he argues for the practice of forming friendships between individuals of different faiths. This type of practice can potentially be experienced through Facebook-friendship. Going beyond what occurs through attitudes of tolerance, he finds opportunity for the transformation of lives in friendship between Christians and non-Christians. This can even begin by recognizing the 'stranger' that still exists within one who has been a longstanding friend. In acknowledging the stranger, a move is made away from familiar territory towards new possibilities and understanding ourselves in new ways. 'In befriending the stranger, we have not only found a way of taking another human being seriously and rejoicing in what we have in common but also a way of holding in regard what is different from us, what we have not chosen for ourselves for cherishing and living' (Fredericks 1998, 165).

In recognizing the benefits of friendship with a stranger, Fredericks acknowledges that befriending the stranger requires reciprocity. One must not only be willing to open oneself up to something unfamiliar, but the stranger must also be willing to offer welcome into their world. The effort is worthy of development because 'Interreligious friendships are human excellencies that contribute to the flourishing of human life' (Fredericks 1998, 167). Here we find a pursuit of friendship not based on common identity in Christ, common interests, personal gain, or command, but sought for an overall good. This is a goal consistent with the concept of mission in friendship. In inter-religious friendships, the different religions can become known through the person of the friend. Understanding can come about through knowing of the other faith through a lived and practiced demonstration. Understanding can be realized in openness to truth. Fredericks assures us that this value is not an uncritical acceptance of the other's certainty, but an opportunity for a new encounter with our own truth. These encounters require us to take both their faith and our own seriously enough to acquire the knowledge, develop the skills, and exercise the imagination to interpret our own tradition in ways that are understandable and real.

A stumbling block in seeking to develop friendships with those of different religious beliefs is a tendency to avoid any perceived threat to the 'comprehensiveness and coherence of one's own religion but also to its plausibility' (Fredericks 1998, 171). Through the practice of inter-religious friendship, Fredericks sees possibilities for gaining insights into the limits of coherence and rationality of our own views as a result of grasping the stranger's view from outside. However, realistic recognition of the plurality of religious goals is important.

Important differences cannot be ignored in our enthusiasm to invent similarities for the purpose of forging a friendship. Just as other types of friendships fail for valid reasons, Fredericks warns that inter-religious friendships are endangered ‘... when they are no longer relationships wherein religious differences are honored and recognized as possible resources for deepening our own religious self-understanding’ (Fredericks 1998, 172). These types of friendships enacted through Facebook have the potential to strengthen the understanding of both friends as they learn to communicate their theology through friendship.

Practising hospitality and inter-religious friendships offer possibilities for being faithful to Jesus’ command to go and bear fruit by showing mercy or being a friend to our neighbour, stranger, or enemy. Offering hospitality or entering into inter-religious friendships might be a worthy goal for Christians but it is often difficult for young adult Christians to reorder their lives to wholly accommodate someone outside the parameters of their school, work, and family situations. Although the internet has removed many barriers to communicating with people outside of one’s immediate sphere, opportunities for meaningful interaction are often restricted. They may be initiated and explored through various experiences of posting as Facebook-friends. Considering Bretherton’s and Fredericks’ theologies of mission in friendship offered through hospitality and inter-religious friendships is useful in raising awareness of how to bring a Christian approach to opportunities for friendship that arise in a globalizing world.

4.4.4 Friendship as mission: Facebook practices

In addition to posts made that may reveal a Christian identity through their content if not their intent, young adult Christians discussed or demonstrated the role of Facebook in mission. This included participating in Christian groups on Facebook, praying for others, posting scripture, sharing sermons or music, and demonstrating theological assumptions and values. Participants who are members of Christian organizations spoke of their appreciation for the ability to get information about and connect with others in a Facebook- group through posts on the organization’s Facebook page. They like that they can receive uplifting content and reminders of events through Facebook posts. However, the posts and content of the group pages are often available only to members of the group so while there is opportunity to use these Christian group posts in mission to non-Christian Facebook-friends, by limiting the view to subscribed members, the mission possibilities are reduced. Administrators of the Facebook-groups can make the group open to all Facebook-users to join, but formation of the group may

be evidence of a practice of exclusivity and run counter to a theology of openness and invitation to Christian activities extended to others.

When a participant asks for prayer or mentions praying on Facebook, they are demonstrating their theology related to the place of praying for friends in practising friendship. Some participants said that they had responded or indicated concern for friends on Facebook by posting encouraging or sympathetic messages even if a specific request for prayer was not made. Lindsey explained,

A lot of my friends and I write on people's walls that we are praying for them, post scripture.

A Facebook response to tragedy can be an emotional thanksgiving such as made by Cara after a mass shooting occurred:

Thank God for everything!! My Friends are okay!!!!

Cara's comment raises theological questions but is very likely not a considered reflection to the tragedy as much as it is an expression of immediate relief. However, the posting of such a comment on Facebook invites theological consideration and opens the door to more deliberate responses. The poster may or may not be prepared to engage in theological discussions, particularly on Facebook. So although the intention may be to demonstrate care and concern for others in the face of tragedy, the practice appears emotional and not necessarily a reflection of theology.

Lindsey and Cara's posts may indicate their assumptions and values of friendship that attribute worth to praying for friends, both particularly and in wider circumstances. However, prayers or requests for prayers on Facebook were infrequently observed among the young adult Christians who were Facebook-friends of the researcher during a two-year period of observation. This may be indicative of theologies that regard prayer as a private practice perhaps reflecting familiarity with Matthew 6:6: 'But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.' Or it could be a response to other contextual or social influences that disapprove of public prayer.

Several respondents said they may refer on Facebook to a speaker or sermon they have particularly appreciated and provide a link to a recording of it. Joseph has a practice of posting

a hymn on his Facebook page every week. He makes an effort to post hymns that 'have something to think about' in them and a version of the hymn performed with organ music so that it sounds like a church service. He said that he does not expect people to comment but sometimes Facebook-friends indicate that they 'Like' his post. With this practice, he is expressing a value for sharing the church's tradition and music with his friends, perhaps demonstrating hospitality through a digital format. In evoking a feeling of being in a church service and listening to a common musical offering, the practice of Christians united in spirit and activity is realized in mission to his participating Facebook-friends.

4.4.5 Friendship as mission: Evangelizing on Facebook

For some of the young adult Christians in the study, mission is understood as evangelism, although mission is considered to have a richer meaning (Bosch 1980). 'Mission refers to a permanent and intrinsic dimension of the church's life' (Bosch 1995, 32), of which evangelism is an element. Many participants said they were not comfortable using Facebook to evangelize. Some participants mentioned they did not like it when other Christians posted evangelizing content on Facebook. Molly's explanation may represent a typical approach:

You express it better in action than in word. Not God bless, God bless, God bless. You don't really need to put it on there if you are doing it ... I like how our pastor is trying to get us to bring people to chapel but in a more personal way. If I'm talking to someone about faith, I would want to do it one on one, not on Facebook.

In the previous section it was demonstrated that the young adult Christians were open to witnessing to their own faith through the profiles, words, and actions they post on Facebook. Explicitly evangelizing to friends through Facebook is not considered an appropriate mission according to most of the participants. The practice demonstrated here is one that does not deny Christ in one's own life but is deliberate to not suggest that Christianity is the best choice for one's Facebook-friends. This may be a practice of Christianity in a pluralistic society and one that runs counter to traditional Christian theology of mission in scripture.

Some participants said that they posted scripture on Facebook that would be available to both their Christian and non-Christian friends. Practices that include posting or receiving scripture on a Facebook wall may be seen as an example of evangelism in friendship. They identify the one posting as a Christian and demonstrate their willingness to share their faith. The attitude that evangelism even to one's own 'friends', much less a commission to the world, is

considered off-limits in certain contexts (such as Facebook) may demonstrate an understanding of mission that is in tension with popular attitudes and practices of tolerance. Yet although their inclination indicates aversion to evangelizing, their practices that reveal their Christian faith on Facebook are ones of witness to their friends. This opens possibilities for missional activities.

4.4.6 Friendship as mission: Theological discussions on Facebook

In addition to not evangelizing on Facebook, most of the young adult Christians in the study choose to avoid getting into theological discussions on Facebook. Participants agreed that Facebook is not an appropriate format for meaningful discussions. The common practice is to avoid controversial topics on Facebook, rather than to risk being misunderstood or ridiculed publically on Facebook. There were a few exceptions. Brent mentioned posting topics that he thought would be controversial in the hope of getting responses that would lead to a discussion among Facebook-friends.

I have quotes about difficult topics but they are ambiguous to provoke thought on both sides, for example, pro-life/pro-choice. I like to put things like that which are essentially very theological, particularly chosen and meant to cause them to think. My posts are more of that, to mix up both sides of the debate, look at things differently.

He went on to describe the results saying, 'It [the discussion] is usually short but there is the occasional big long message; I feel kind of bad about that but in real life you don't really have a lot of long, deep discussions either.' He explained that he often used Facebook to arrange to meet with someone to further discuss an issue that could not be adequately addressed on Facebook. This could be considered an act of mission recognizing the value of spending time with others despite the possible discomfort of topic or inconvenience in schedule.

Mandy's experience provides an example of an earnest attempt to use Facebook to express theological views on a controversial subject to her Facebook-friends. A controversy had appeared in the media regarding comments the CEO of Chick-Fil-A made about his support of traditional marriage. In response to a Facebook-friend supporting the right of the CEO to make his comments, Mandy countered her Facebook-friend's view and provided a lengthy theological response as a post on Facebook. In doing so, Mandy engages in mission through friendship. She is not reticent about sharing her interpretation of the use of scripture or using scripture to make her points. That she presents a theological view on Facebook, not

necessarily the views themselves, is what is of interest in this research. It is a demonstration of her assumptions and values regarding mission in friendship.

4.4.7 Section summary: *Theologically considering mission in the Types of Posts model*

Assumptions and values of the participants related to mission in friendship as recognized in the Types of Posts model are often in tension. They may be challenged by culture and other theological understandings. Examples of hospitality, inter-religious friendship, and specific faith practices demonstrated on Facebook provide practical application of realizing mission in friendship. Tension is evidenced in practices related to creating Christian groups on Facebook, prayer, reading scripture, and evangelism. In examples given, participants gave hints of their theologies in their intent that were not evidenced in their practices, by their own descriptions. Consistency in assumptions and values and practices was observed in the example of posting sermons or hymns.

The concept of friendship with God did not emerge in the fieldwork. Consideration of this theology could impact the practices of mission in friendship by realizing God's friendship towards us as the foundation and enabler for all other friendships. Reflection on theological values and assumptions in relation to theologies of friendship as mission can encourage the practices that are faithful to a calling in Christ.

4.5 Conclusion to the theological analysis (faith practices) chapter

This chapter used the models derived from the experience in the fieldwork to structure a theological analysis and make the argument that Facebook friendship practices of young adult Christians both affirm and challenge, and are themselves affirmed and challenged by, theological understandings of friendship. Each model was used to explore a different aspect of friendship (friends, neighbours, witness, mission) for the Christian influences in the formation of practices of friendship on Facebook. Theologies of friendship based on scripture, tradition, and theological interpretations were introduced to bring the assumptions and values evidenced in the Facebook and friendship practices of the participants into broader theological understandings of friendship. Assumptions and values of young adult Christians were revealed that both challenged and affirmed other theological understandings.

Aelred's reflections on friendship have a firm Christian foundation grounded in scripture. He augments his own experience and understanding with insights from tradition and Church

Fathers. Although much of his language is dated and his ideal of Spiritual Friendship may seem unattainable, his approach to friendship is highly practical and surprisingly relevant to a contemporary exploration. Grounded in the experiential monastic life, he described a personal understanding of God through reason, learning and love. His approach may well be considered similar to that of a modern practical theologian in that 'By engaging the imagination, and helping the other characters of the dialogue to do the same, he raises questions, makes suggestions, and opens possibilities that inspire us to embark on a similar process of reflection' (Billy in Aelred 2008, 18). Although the focal point of Aelred's writing is on what may be a rare and special friendship, his theology opens up space for discussion of other friendships that we can also better understand from a Christian perspective. As Billy observes, 'Discussing the practical advantages, the limitations, and the fruits of spiritual friendship has little value if it does not encourage us to reflect upon the quality of relationships in our own lives, and to ask ourselves if they are a help or a hindrance in fostering our relationship with God' (Billy in Aelred 2008, 53–54).

Lewis provides an understanding of theological value in friendships that are more akin to the contexts of many of the friendships of young adult Christians. Even theologically considering Facebook-friendships that are more of a connection than a relationship helps to clarify different purposes in friendships and the significance of intention in the persistence of friendship.

The Categories of Friends model was used to focus on friendship with neighbours through interpreting friendship as a school of Christian love based on Augustine's theological writing on friendship. Viewing practical models, such as that provided by Swinton, considering current practices related to deleting Facebook-friends, and introducing theological concepts outside one's current scope, bring forward consideration of contradictory issues of inclusion, exclusion, and particularity in friendship. The use of methods of practical theology does not presume to provide easy answers but aims to encourage participants in their own theological reflection.

Study of scripture and theology based on Christ demonstrating friendship emphasizes the importance of disclosure and sharing to friendship. These theologies are applicable to Facebook-posting practices depicted in the Posting Frequency and Disclosure model. Aquinas' theology of friendship with God contributes to an understanding of mission. Theologies of friendship through hospitality, inter-religious friendships, and the various types of Facebook

posts relate to the Types of Posts model by demonstrating that mission flows out of friendship with God. Table 4.1 is presented again to summarize the points of the chapter.

TABLE 4.1.

Aspects of friendship in a theological context	Theological analysis topics	Model	Theological values for encounter and engagement
Friends	Friends as gifts	Levels of Friendship	Purpose in friendship
Neighbours	Friendship as a school of Christian love	Categories of Friends	Inclusion, exclusion, particularity in practising friendship
Witness	Christ demonstrating friendship	Posting Frequency and Disclosure	Faith disclosed through friendship
Mission	Friendship with God	Types of Posts	Mission through friendship

The exploration of friendship practices through Facebook that started with the fieldwork and continued in the situational analysis developed further with the addition of voices of theology to explain faith practices. This chapter brings forward questions related to the origins and persistence of friendship through consideration of theologies of friendship with both neighbours and friends and effects of friendship made manifest in witness and mission. Practices of Facebook, friendship and faith will encounter and engage with each other regarding these issues in the next chapter.

Chapter 5. Encounter and Engagement – Facebook, Friendship, Faith: Bringing the Practices Together

Chapter Arguments: An encounter of Facebook, friendship and faith practices of young adult Christians regarding understandings of the origination and persistence of friendship suggests outcomes of intention and discernment in practices.

Facebook, friendship and faith practices of young adult Christians engage through witness and mission to realize outcomes of affirmation and demonstration that provide a voice of theology heard through social media.

Chapter Introduction

This research is about practising friendship as a Christian in contemporary contexts. In Chapter 2 we attended to descriptions of Facebook and friendship practices of young adult Christians. Models were used to organize assumptions and values of the participants identified from the fieldwork. In Chapter 3 the practices were placed in the context of wider social/cultural dimensions in order to see how these young people are following culture and where they are being counter-cultural. In Chapter 4 we viewed their value-laden practices alongside theologies of friendship – again to see how there is resonance and dissonance. In this chapter the social/cultural aspects of friendship practices encounter and engage with the theological perspectives. The analysis is based on an understanding of the relationship between faith practices and the ‘wider culture’ that has been established by the preceding chapters.

This is the stage in Swinton and Mowat’s model to ‘draw together the cultural/contextual analysis with the theological reflection and combine these two dimensions with our original reflections on the situation’ (Swinton and Mowat 2006, 96). In Lartey’s description, it is where faith traditions, experience, and context encounter and question each other as theory is applied to the concrete practices of friendship (Lartey, 2000).

Particular issues have emerged from analysis of the data organized by the models. A theme based on the experience, situational, and theological analysis of each model will form the basis for the dialogue and challenges among the practices. The analysis topics and discussion issues are summarized in Table 5.1.

TABLE 5.1.

	Experience	Context	Theology	Theme
Categories of Friends	Making friends is important	Befriending, caring, and adapting	Inclusion, exclusion, particularity in friendship	Origination of friendship
Levels of Friendship	Realizing value in all relationships	Being in relationship	Purpose in friendship	Persistence in friendship
Posting Frequency and Disclosure	Sharing as essential to friendship	Knowing and Sharing	Faith disclosed through friendship	Witness in friendship
Types of Posts	Message in friendship	Ways of relating through friendship	Mission flows out of friendship with God	Mission through friendship

The Types of Posts synthesis of the analyses will take place in two phases, leading towards connection of the practices. The models again provide structure for the analysis. The first two models, Categories of Friends and Levels of Friendship, are descriptive of the nature of the relationships between Facebook-friends. The models and understandings correspond to hierarchical structuring recognized in both cultural and patriarchal theological traditions. ‘Encounter’ is the terminology used in considering these structured aspects of the practices. The encounter provides the argument:

An encounter of Facebook, friendship and faith practices of young adult Christians regarding understandings of the origination and persistence of friendship suggests outcomes of intention and discernment in practices.

Through the analysis based on the Category of Friends model, social and cultural practices encounter theological practices in asking, ‘How do we become friends?’ In the analysis based on the Levels of Friendship model, the practices encounter each other with the question, ‘How do we remain in friendship?’ Table 5.2 illustrates the questions and issues pertinent to themes of origination and persistence in friendship that emerged for synthesis in encounter of the practices.

TABLE 5.2.

Activity	Model	Question	Social/Cultural Considerations	Theological Considerations	Theme
Encounter	Categories of Friends	How do we become friends?	Developmental issues	Friendship and friends as gifts	Origination of friendship
	Levels of Friendship	How do we remain in friendship?	Networks, technology, social capital	Friendship as a school of Christian love	Persistence in friendship

An encounter is the step to establish a field for engagement in the move towards connection. The Posting Frequency and Disclosure model and the Types of Posts models are more organic in concept than the structured frameworks of the Categories of Friends and Levels of Friendship models. The Posting Frequency and Disclosure and the Types of Posts models describe ways of engaging in friendship. The themes emerging from the engagement described in the latter part of this chapter are witness and mission.

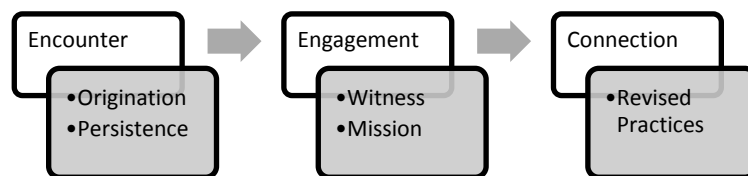


FIGURE 5.1.

Figure 5.1 illustrates the themes involved as Facebook, friendship and faith practices encounter and engage in order to connect. Connection could lead to revised practices in none, any, some, or all of the practices.

5.1 Encounter: Theoretical framework for the encounter of practices of Facebook, friendship and faith

Dialogues between theological and cultural voices often use a framework that refers to the typology of H. Richard Niebuhr's 'enduring problem' of the relationship of Christianity and civilization (Niebuhr 2001). Niebuhr recognizes that Christ himself was a child of a religious culture and called disciples each from within their own contexts. He identifies Christ's teachings as leading away from temporality and the pluralism of culture. The responses

Niebuhr labels as Christ Against Culture, Christ of Culture, Christ Above Culture, Christ and Culture in Paradox, and Christ the Transformer of Culture, represent distinctive responses that have been offered to the question of Christ's relationship to culture. These responses he identifies are understood, again, in the sense of an 'ideal type' in sociological terms. None of the descriptions are a concrete reality or are wholly satisfactory. They all bear some truth and some likenesses to each other. Martin Marty suggests that they be considered as 'zones' rather than discrete categories or boxes (Marty in Niebuhr 2001, xviii). Together they are illustrative of motifs that continue to resonate with contemporary struggles to resolve the problem.

Niebuhr's preference appears to be for Christ Transforming Culture. Relating the truths he identifies to Facebook as a culture could provide these understandings:

TABLE 5.3.

Niebuhr's Transforming Culture – recognizing three truths:	Relating Niebuhr's truths to Facebook as a culture
1. Culture is a part of God's good creation	1. A 'Facebook culture' is part of God's good creation
2. Sin infects all of creation, including culture	2. Sin exists in and through a 'Facebook culture'
3. Christ can redeem/transform culture	3. Christ can redeem/transform a 'Facebook culture'

Methods of practical theology prompt reflection on practices of Christians, which will subsequently have an impact on the contexts within which they are practising, such as a Facebook culture. Thus Niebuhr's model suggests that a Facebook culture can be redeemed through transforming practices of young adult Christians.

For the young adult Christians involved in this study, Niebuhr's description of Christ and Culture in Paradox may be a more accurate descriptor of their experience. It requires them to consider how they are able to affirm what they can know and understand of God's will for the world while living in a world they may perceive to be ungodly. An approach such as this does not suggest compromise; it acknowledges and cooperates with what God is doing in the world. There is desire and attempt to be a part of God at work in the world in his time and way.

This typology of Niebuhr has influenced thinking since the 1950s. It has been developed in further directions (Strassen, Yeager, and Yoder 1996; Kavanaugh 1981), and also criticized by some of the same theologians and church historians for the positioning of his premise and types (Stassen, Yeager, and Yoder 1996; Hauerwas and Willimon 1989), being restrictive in pointing towards a solution in a single approach (Carson 2008), as well as for presuming that strict dichotomization of faith and culture is even possible (Tanner 1997).³⁷ If understood as a conceptual framework it is useful for considering various possible positions for Christians in relation to culture. It does not offer the specific type of guidance for practice suggested by some theologians considering Christians practising their understanding of their faith within the context of society and politics. Nor is it a methodological approach such as offered in models of practical theology. Despite criticisms that point to flaws in Niebuhr's premises and types, his work has been highly effective in generating reflection and responses on issues of Christian practices and even provoking questions on conceptions of culture itself.

Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon find Niebuhr's openness to the positive aspects of all the types he defines is a pluralistic foundation presupposing a bias towards the Transformational type (Hauerwas and Willimon 1989, 41). Their epistemology is intra-textual. In not attempting to defend the faith on rationalist terms set by the Enlightenment, the issues are different from Niebuhr's 'enduring problem'. They argue that asking 'How can we make the gospel credible to the modern world?' is attempting to 'transform the gospel rather than ourselves. ... The theologian's job is not to make the gospel credible to the modern world, *but to make the world credible to the gospel*' (Hauerwas and Willimon 1989, 24). Their approach emphasizes the importance of Christian formation of young people by describing a Christian colony operating within a larger culture. The vocabulary of colony itself depicts a separate people acting from values and ideology learned in a community of faith. They stress the importance of inculcating the habits of 'being the church' which is to be quite obviously different from the culture around it (Hauerwas and Willimon 1989, 46). However, young adults are being shaped by their contextual influences, perhaps to an even greater degree than the theological influences. Thus, as young adult Christians experience life outside of the 'colony' they need to develop the skills that allow them to reflect critically on what they are learning both inside and outside of the faith. Critical reflection can help them to articulate what they understand to be true and operate in ways that demonstrate their desire to live in a manner

³⁷ A discussion of differences in evangelical and post liberal understandings is provided in Lindbeck 1996.

that is consistent with what they say they believe. This process can also be described as a connection of practices through ongoing reflection, conversation, and demonstration as they encounter the issues that emerge in arenas of their lives such as friendship. Examples of the types of friendship issues that they face are inclusion and inconvenience related to originations of friendship.

5.2 Encounter: Originations of friendship – how we become friends

The analysis of the experience as represented by the Categories of Friends model focused primarily on the origin and nature of the various relationships in the lives of young adult Christians. Theologically, we considered concepts of friendship such as God's role in bringing people into a relationship of friendship and even taking on an inconvenient friendship. Concepts from the situational analysis encounter theological positions based on sociological, cultural, developmental, and generational considerations. In both analyses the question was essentially, 'How do we become friends?' As the experience, situation, and theology encounter each other in their considerations of this question, the convenience imperative is evident. Opinions based on cultural influences may raise a challenge that theological ideals make it too difficult to just make friends or be in relationships with others. Encounters over how realistic theology is in regard to friendship are countered by theological reasons to be selective. These challenges and responses are not new, even when considered in the light of digital technology and Facebook. Examples of encounters of social/cultural contexts and theological perspectives can be considered in relation to the theme of origination of friendship.

5.2.1 *Friendship originating through and from God*

People come in to the lives of others in various ways during the progression through developmental stages. The ones who actually become friends may seem serendipitous. Each new category of acquaintance entered into provides opportunities for friendship. Friendships may result simply based on who makes the same choices of activities or universities, or who receives the same assignments to teams, groups, classes, or lockers. One may look for deeper meaning or fate in the circumstances that bring people together but a selection process eventually occurs, whether consciously or not, which questions conclusions of inevitability.

Many theologians, including Augustine, Aelred and Lewis, believed that friends are gifts given by God. This understanding would cause them to seek the gift within each friend or friendship. An encounter regarding a theology of friends as gifts from God would bring up questions such as: Is every friend a gift from God? Is anyone who might eventually become a friend a gift from God, and if so, how does that shape my interaction with them now? If God is providing friends as gifts, do I have no agency in who becomes my friend? Must every gift be accepted? What about the friendless; why has God failed to provide friends for them?

Reflection on these types of questions by Christians may include understandings such as the following:

Humans as created in God's image desire companionship with others.

Friendship is recognized as good and valuable for individuals and society.

Not being open to friendship limits opportunities for good that can be realized by God working in the lives of his people.

Jesus demonstrated being a friend, even to those who were not obvious choices for friends in the eyes of others.

The Augustinian understanding of true friendship for Christians as based in common love for and growth together towards God would appear to limit friendship to only those who are in common accord regarding their theology. This definition is challenging in its idealism because it gives the impression that he believes that true friendship can only be experienced between two Christians as he described within the City of God (Augustine 1963). Evidence of strong and significant friendships throughout history and in all cultures, including Augustine's own personal experiences prior to conversion, belie that assumption (Burt 1999). This is acknowledged by him through his distinction of two cities, or separate spheres of influence and activity. Without engaging with others and reflecting theologically on friendship, it may be difficult to distinguish any difference in Christian friendships. That Augustine uses the same word *amicitia* to describe both kinds of friendship reveals his own ambiguity on differences he tries to define. His allowance for a 'functional' friendship, with one who does not yet share a love of God, provides a means for friendship with a non-Christian neighbour. This also offers a way of addressing the challenge of exclusivity in his theology and is thus able to affirm the

practices of friendship that young adult Christians share with many others, in spite of the difficulties in applying his theology in modern contexts.

Another challenge is the understanding of Augustine, as well as Aelred and Lewis, that human friendship is a component of one's definitive purpose of loving God. This concept seems to minimize the inherent value of human relationships in themselves. However, considering the analogy of friendship as a school or way of learning about love, another understanding derived from Augustinian theology, establishes friendship's importance for growth and formation. It also explains limitations experienced as a result of a young adult's current state of development. If, as Postman argues, the current generation of young adults were presumed to be adults before they were able to be children, areas of social or psychological development are just now being explored (Postman 1994). Experiences of friendship in their current practices, including practices on Facebook, are part of their education and formation. Friendship practices evolve both personally and culturally. As a young adult develops and is shaped by influences of faith as well as culture, those influences will be evidenced in practices and relationships with others.

The example of Augustine appropriating and modifying traditional Classical thinking opens the door for considering how traditional Christian thinking can be considered, debated, adapted and practiced in contemporary culture (Summers 2009). But Augustine's emphasis on an eschatological dimension that friendship's ultimate fulfillment will only be realized in a future state again seems to diminish the value of the present realities. Friendship may be perfected in eventual union in eternity with God, but practically speaking, it is an essential dimension of relationships among mortals during their lifetime. Friendship is neither exclusive to a faith or culture nor only a future state. Friendship for Christians includes all kinds of neighbours and takes place in the present. Encounters concerning the nature of friendships with both Christians and non-Christians allow for an expression of theology that is practical. This is evidenced in the example provided by Swinton's discussion of friendship even when it is inconvenient.

5.2.2 *Origination of an inconvenient friendship*

In an environment that prioritizes connection and convenience, choosing to engage in friendship with a person in a difficult situation or one with a disability may not make sense. It is not likely to be efficient and benefits are not readily apparent. Considering significant

elements of friendship, there is often limited recognition, questionable disclosure, and unequal reciprocity. Features normally present in friendship such as mutually providing assistance, sharing interests and values, common memories, and ease of communication, may not be possible. It is certainly not convenient and the consumption of time involved could inhibit opportunities for other connections. It might appear to be more accurate to consider such a relationship as a responsibility rather than a friendship. In an encounter between the situational aspects and a theological motivation for being in an inconvenient friendship, admiration for the social good may be understood by both sides. However, the rationality or motivation of a theological approach that responds to others by intentionally learning to be a friend in a difficult situation could be challenged.

Swinton's model for friendship with persons with disabilities involves unrelated persons with nothing apparent to gain by the friendship (Swinton 2000b). It requires intentional and learned responses. He does not present it as an easy or instinctive undertaking, nor one for which every Christian is equipped to participate in the same way. Giddens' ideal type of a 'pure relationship' focuses strictly on the rewards delivered by the friendship, finding both coherence with and challenge to the practice of entering into an inconvenient friendship (Giddens 1991). Friendships such as those described by Swinton are not prompted by or tied to external factors such as familial, economic or social considerations. The friendship can then be 'pure' in the sense that it is sought and maintained on its own rewards, assuming rewards are available for both participants. The lack of tethering to requirements to maintain it causes it to be continually evaluated on its own merits. But this is where the value of the relationship would fall short by this sociological perspective of friendship. As the risks involved, alternative options, and cost of time are weighed against the possible rewards for engaging in the relationship, it may not be deemed worth the commitment required.

The theological response to the challenge of friendship with a disabled person does not make economic or emotional sense in terms of equality in reciprocity. But it is consistent with the Gospel. Such friendships are evidence of an understanding of the Gospel message of grace that calls for practical application in life. These friendships recall Christ's example of befriending the different or unlovely ones. They are not entered into with any expectation of reciprocity or reward as can be measured quantitatively. But reward is less important than faithful response for a Christian. Christians respond faithfully by obeying Christ's command to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and heal the sick. In serving them, Christians are serving

God. And there is reciprocity. Those served are providing the opportunity for service, the joy that comes from serving, and the experience of being shaped in the pattern set by Christ. Being called to be a friend in a difficult circumstance is an example of theology challenging the perspective that convenience is the highest value in maintaining relationships. Convenience may be desirable in organizing one's life or even in keeping up with acquaintances and communicating with friends. For Christians, it is not to be valued above the example of Christ and the call to serve others.

5.2.3 Outcome to encounters relating to origination of friendship – intention

When encounter and reflection are an ongoing process, motivations and practices will likely become more intentional in the friendships and actions. Considerations may include how and why individuals come into one's life as a friend and who one consciously engages with regardless of the convenience or inconvenience. Young adult Christians can use questions like the following in reflecting on theological perspectives in terms of understanding of the origination of friendship:

What is God's role in my friendships with others?

How can I practise friendship in ways that are intentional and consistent with my faith?

5.3 Encounter: Persistence in friendship – how we remain in friendship

Findings from the Levels of Friendship model informed discussion of practices as based on depth in friendship. Discussions and attitudes displayed in the research and general conversation revealed that to consciously reflect on or discuss friendship as a 'practice' or to systematically define varying levels of friendship are not regular activities. Typical responses to suggestions of these types of considerations might be 'My friends are just my friends' and 'I don't need to think about being a friend; I just go about being me in my friendships.' So although discussion about and reflection on friendship may not be common activities, behaviours and practices indicate that young adult Christians are at some level continuously working out the question of 'How do I maintain my friendships?' To presume that such reflection is not of significance to them would be to underestimate their intellectual curiosity, minimize the importance of their faith journey, and is counter to the experience of the fieldwork. The following section demonstrates how methods of practical theology can guide

participants in their reflection on friendship at various depths by using discernment in the ways that friendship is practised.

The theological analysis of the Levels of Friendship model considered distinctions in the depths of friendships maintained by young adult Christians using Facebook in their practices of friendship. Friends are important and necessary, but time and emotional constraints prevent maintaining close or intense friendships with everyone with whom one is acquainted. Being in relationship with people at various levels of closeness is a natural element of friendship. Facebook provides convenience that makes it possible to at least have a digital connection to many others at various levels of friendship. Convenience is desirable in the situational analysis and not necessarily disparaged from a theological perspective. Theological considerations can inform and enhance the nature and meaning of the various types of relationships, supporting convenience as valuable to many situations of practising friendship.

Aelred's descriptions of types of friendships appear to be outdated, simplistic, unrealistic, monastic, and radical delineations. They endure because they contain truth and provide sound advice for even twenty-first century Christians interested in convenience and connection. With regard to both Carnal and Worldly friendships, the descriptions of these types of friendships are recognizable and consistent with the practices prevalent and acceptable in contemporary settings. Practically speaking, the concept and practice of Spiritual Friendship are difficult to realize. It is exacerbated in a consumerist society that privileges convenience over the time and attention required for nurturing deep friendships. Challenges to Aelred's descriptions of Spiritual Friendship, Carnal Friendship, and Worldly Friendship have legitimacy based on the differences in his culture and our own. Aelred's distinctions of friendship and love can be criticized as inflexible and unrealistic, but that may be an expected limitation from using linguistic terms to describe experiential concepts.

Delineations of types and facilitation of friendships correspond with current practices of friendship for young adult Christians in their contemporary context. Figure 5.2 depicts the theological and cultural correspondence of practices of friendship with Facebook in terms of depth. The theologically defined Carnal Friend is comparable to the friendship defined in the fieldwork model as Social Friend. This type of relationship is facilitated through Facebook as a matter of convenience. The theologically defined Worldly Friend is comparable to the culturally understood Acquaintance. This type of relationship is facilitated through Facebook for the value of connection. The Spiritual Friend, defined theologically as being centred in the

common purposes in Christ, is not precisely comparable to the culturally understood Close Friend or Intimate. In every level of friendship of a contemporary young adult Christian there is most likely a Facebook-friendship but Facebook is not instrumental in facilitating Close Friendships or Spiritual Friendships.

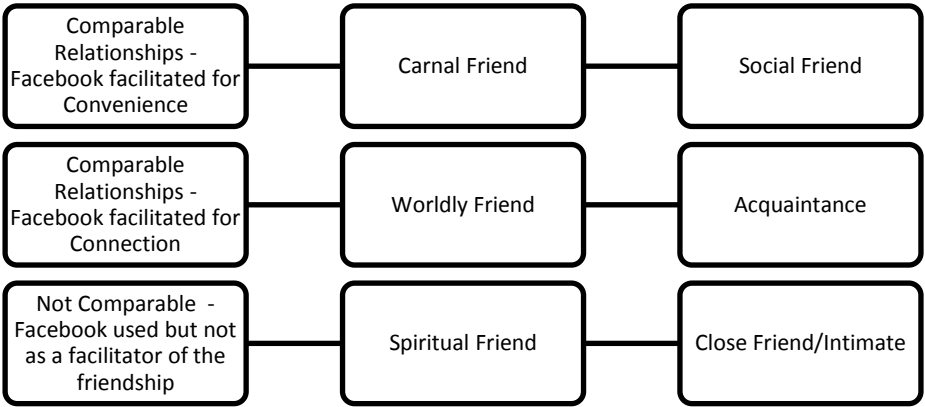
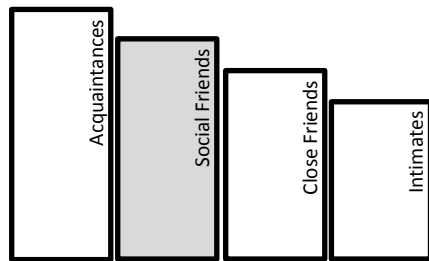


FIGURE 5.2.

In the situational analysis of the Levels of Friendship model, the importance of technology and social capital to connection was emphasized from a variety of sources that included Turkle, Willson, Palfrey and Gasser, Putnam, and Ellison. In light of those considerations, the theologies of friendship Aelred describes using his three-level model can be questioned as unnecessary, impractical, and impossible. Not to engage in friendships that are based on common interests and pleasure would deprive a person of great enjoyment in life. Not to engage in friendships that offer opportunities for benefit to either one or both parties is impractical. To only maintain Close Friendships with a few carefully chosen and tested like-minded Christians may be impossible. But as practice, context, and theology encounter each other related to persistence in friendship, movement towards connection can be made from all directions.

5.3.1 Persistence in friendship with Social Friends



Encounter through discussions with others, both non-Christian and Christian, concerning ways of being in friendship would likely result in dismissing Aelred's and affirming Lewis' theological perspectives on the level of Carnal Friendship or Social Friends. Life in contemporary society involves interacting socially with many people. As a result of their generational expectations and the tools available that enable the connections, young adults would feel bereft without their Social Friends. Digital technology and personal devices are so accessible to most young adults in Western societies that connections with Social Friends can be easily entered into and maintained. Aelred could accurately be describing Facebook friendship when he says that 'this sort of friendship is undertaken without deliberation, is tested by no act of judgment, is in no wise governed by reason' (Aelred 2008, 40).

Most people in contemporary society would challenge Aelred's theological stance critical of Carnal or Social Friends with the understanding that all relationships can not be or do not need to be at a level of great depth. People enjoy and learn from being with a variety of other people. It is a social inclination that calls us out on the weekend to meet others, engage in conversation, share a drink or a meal, listen to music, be entertained, and relax. The ebb and flow of a schedule recognizes the need for variation from a routine. Stimulation from considering different ideas, reflecting on one's own position, defending beliefs, and debating issues, requires interaction with other people and different other people. Those other people should not always be and do not need to be close friends but they are important in other ways. In a consumer society, a legitimized choice is to be connected with numerous others as conveniently as possible.

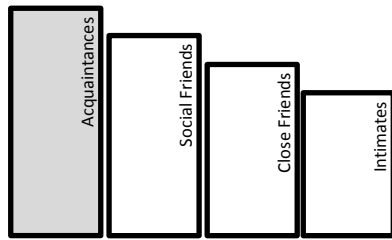
It is an unfortunate issue of semantics or translation that common English usage labels the relationships described by both Aelred and Facebook as 'friends' when other less emotion-packed terms might be more accurate descriptors of the relationships. However, the challenge

to theological views of Aelred's on Social Friends can be met with Lewis' theology of friendship. Lewis' delineation of four types of love is based on explaining and differentiating the Greek words used to describe the different kinds of human love. He understands all of them as reflecting God's 'Gift- Love' for humanity. By showing friendship as something different from the feelings between parent and child (affection), the desire for a beloved (eros), or love for and response to God (charity), he provides a model for discerning differences in the nature of relationships (Lewis 1977). If all of these meanings are described as 'love', then it is reasonable to understand that various interpretations can be described as 'friendship'. Aelred describes three types of friendship but he disparages two of the types and elevates one type. Lewis's use of 'friendship' describes one of Aelred's disparaged types of friendship (Carnal) and theologically interprets it in a redeeming sense. For Lewis, the common bond that brings friends together sustains the relationship as friends grow closer in the mutual pleasure of the relationship and love of the individual. Therefore the basis of shared love, while not necessarily love of Christ, is a vehicle through which two individuals can know and love each other and themselves be expanded and enriched by the other as they seek the best for their friend.

Yet while Lewis' exuberance for friendship is exhilarating and could find agreement among non-Christians, he makes clear his understanding that for Christians, friendship itself is grounded in God. It is through friendship that Christians reveal God to others, and in friends that God is seen and experienced. Although these interpretations this may not be clear to everyone, Christians can live and practise friendship in ways that demonstrate that they see God in others and seek to reflect his glory in their own lives. Through friendship they offer testimony to God.

Young adult Christians can demonstrate this understanding of friendship in their Social Friendships. They value their Social Friends for their unique characteristics and upon reflection they may be able to discern God's gift of friendship within each relationship. Friendship practices of young adult Christians, exemplified in recognition of the levels of friendship through various purposes for using Facebook, respond to challenges to Aelred's attitude towards Carnal Friendships with the demonstrations of Lewis' theological approach discussed in *Four Loves*.

5.3.2 Persistence in friendship with Acquaintances



Aelred was also critical of friendships entered into for gain or advantage (Worldly).

Contemporary practices challenge this theology and promote these types of relationships as necessary for personal happiness and integral to professional success. Wadell affirms that business connections, career advancement, and competing for position in a complex world are difficult without connecting with acquaintances or friends of friends who offer avenues of entry into social, educational, professional, or cultural opportunities (Wadell in Kruttschitz 2008). The studies of Ellison and many others confirm that social capital is valuable, worth acquiring and maintaining (Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe 2007; Granovetter 1983; Mesch and Talmud 2010; Haythornwaite 2005). Young adults learn the value of connections early in their lives and are encouraged to tap in to all resources available not only to gain a competitive advantage but to realize other personal benefits that may accrue from knowing many people from different arenas.

Not to take advantage of the benefits of technology that provide the means to be connected, stay informed, and network with others, is to not fully realize the value of social capital. It may also be an impractical way to operate in the twenty-first century. Technology has developed both as a response to the demands for and as a facilitator of more convenience and faster connections. There is no longer even a requirement to be tethered to a desk or laptop in order to be connected to hundreds of friends. Mobile phones and tablets provide the mobility and instant access that consumers crave and demand. These devices and technology make it appear that there is no reason to limit oneself and one's communication ability to a few friends when it is so easy to be connected to everyone on one's Facebook-friend list. According to conventional wisdom, no-one is hurt by the connections (though this is certainly arguable in some circumstances) and everyone has the opportunity for gain (but not equally so).

Schultze offers a critique of culture dominated by technology from the perspective of a Christian who appreciates the valuable attributes of technology but recognizes inherent limitations. He seeks to raise awareness of dangers such as inclinations towards individualism and impatience which tend to break down community and responsibility (Schultze 2002, 18). If attention is not being paid, the promises of technology in terms of efficiency and control may be allowed to shape values that are presumed to be of unilateral benefit (Schultze 2002, 18). His reflection has led him to understand that, 'The flourishing of friendship in modern society depends far more on the spread of virtue than on access to information technology' (Schultze 2002, 202). Schultze advocates for a return to more organic forms of community to retrieve the realistic sense of self grounded in habits that enrich life and glorify God in everyday living. An organic community includes attention to relationships with friends and acquaintances. Young adult Christians can clarify and understand their own practices through reflecting on and considering the realities of who one's friends are, why they are friends, and how the relationships are maintained.

Christian organizations are quite apparently not theologically opposed to utilizing technology for connection and convenience. Many are quite deliberately using and investing in social media, perhaps guided by theologians and scholars consulted for this research such as Borgmann, Schultze, Campbell, Hipps, and Jewell.³⁸ Churches have websites to provide information about their ministry, mission, staff, and members. Programming announcements are made through Facebook, Twitter, and in blogs. Pledges and monetary gifts can be transacted on-line. Pastors, staff and members use social media to communicate with each other and their larger audience of Facebook-friends, which includes Worldly Friends or Acquaintances. Social media allows the church to meet people, many people, where they are and to engage with them. Results are not measureable, benefits are not certain, but without taking advantage of the opportunities available through technology to engage with the wider audience available through these types of connections, the potential for God to work through these avenues of communication will not be realized.

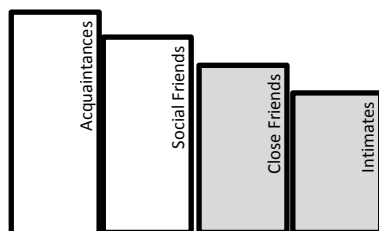
Worldly Friendships or connections with Acquaintances for the benefit of the other are the realm in which hospitality, mission, and charitable work can take place. If connections based on benefit received are disallowed, it would eliminate the possibility of placing oneself in

³⁸ Other theologians and writers discussing technology and the church that were consulted for this project include Borgmann 1993; Lochhead 1988, 1997; Lynch 2005, 2007; Rice 2009; Schultze and Woods 2008; Taylor 2008; Wuthnow 2007.

positions where they can be of benefit to others or have the potential to provide future benefit. This does not cohere with God's promise for his chosen people to be blessed in order that they can be a blessing to others (Gen 12:3).

Aelred's theological objection to Worldly Friendships was based on motivation, not on the good that could be accomplished. As he defined them, Worldly Friendships were relationships not grounded in genuine desire for the good of the other, as is characteristic of what he understood to be a true friendship. Instead they are focused on self-interest, gain, and reward. Young adults may dismiss his warning of 'deceit and intrigue' as overly dramatic, but activities they good-humoredly label as 'sucking up' and 'stalking' are examples of the same behaviour he warns against. A teacher or employer may be 'suck-uped' to or misled in order to get a better grade or job assignment. Facebook-friends may be 'stalked' by following their activities without actually engaging with them. A theological response to the challenge that nothing is wrong with Worldly Friendships calls for reflection on each relationship and the missiological aspect of interaction with others. One should consider the motivation in entering into or persisting in the relationship, how it is attended to, and the role each friend is playing in the other's life. In many cases with Worldly Friends or Acquaintances, the motivations are inoffensive, the attention required or paid is minimal, and there is no vital role for the relationship for either participant. However, a Christian approach might seek to engage in such a way that every friend is recognized as a child of Christ and their role in the relationship does not involve depersonalizing or instrumentalizing their friend. Seeking to discern how to be an instrument for God's purposes in every relationship is a theologically sound way to include Worldly Friends in connecting practices of Facebook, friendship and faith.

5.3.3 Persisting in friendship with Spiritual Friendships



The third and only genuine type of friendship according to Aelred, Spiritual Friendship, is a challenging concept for both Christians and non-Christians. For this theology of friendship, the plausibility of the friendship itself is questioned, whereas the challenges to the other types of

friendship were to Aelred's attitude towards culturally acceptable understandings of friendship. The Spiritual Friendship that he describes is not only limited to Christians but is so idealized that it would appear that even Christians would have difficulty meeting the requirements, finding suitable like-minded friends, and abiding in such a relationship. Thus if Aelred is read without understanding his context, it can be argued that he raises the bar too high for accepting a friend. Shared habits and similarity of disposition contribute to compatibility, but restraining levity could sap the joy from a friendship. Suppressing suspicion rules out caring enough to be jealous. A controlled temper limits emotion. And these are the positive attributes he lists for a friend (Aelred 2008, 91)! Then, although he advocates for forgiveness and repentance, limiting friendships to those who are not argumentative, touchy, indecisive, wary, or talkative, within a pool of people further limited to Christians, could lead to a lonely life. This is particularly true for young adults who are in developmental and social stages characterized by moodiness, questioning and suspicion of authority, indecision, lack of direction, and even, for some, chattiness, dark humour, or sarcasm.

If candidates for friendship meeting Aelred's criteria can be found, the idea of a formal testing process would be questioned in an environment where entering into Facebook-friendships can easily occur with little consideration given. Yet although the idea seems strange or even offensive, friendships are continuously tested as priorities change and decisions are made that alter the relationship or reveal differing values. The volume and nature of Facebook-friendships represented by the Levels of Friendship model may seem at odds with the careful selection process prescribed by Aelred. Actually it may reflect the process in progress as many friendships are entered into but few relationships advance to the deeper levels of friendship. Aelred's agreement with Augustine that friends are gifts from God appears to be contingent on the friends passing the testing process. Valid questions of friendship as exclusive and limited to Christians arise again from this theological understanding and are to be expected in encounters of Facebook, friendship and faith practices.

5.3.4 Failing to persist in friendship: Deconstruction of friendship

A practical issue from encounter emerges in the very different ways of ending a friendship in the practices of Facebook-friendships compared to Aelred's description. Many friendships end naturally when contact is less frequent as a result of changes in location, circumstances, understandings, or priorities. However, it is also sometimes necessary to intentionally withdraw from a friendship. From the theological perspective of Aelred, there were very

specific reasons why a friendship should be ended, how this should be brought about, and what might be expected in terms of residual effects. The level of friendship that his advice relates to is that of a Spiritual Friend. All of the faults he identifies (upbraiding, reproach, pride, disclosing of secrets, treacherous wound, causing injury to another friend) continue to be valid causes of damage to a friendship and justification for the termination of a close relationship (Aelred 2008, III.23). In regard to relationships with those called friends but who are more accurately labelled as Acquaintances, less dramatic reasons for the relationships ending are more common since the depth of the relationship is much less and there are fewer opportunities to cause one of the actions that Aelred lists.

Given the technology that enables a digital connection to and disconnection from Facebook-friends, the necessity for the slow withdrawal advised by Aelred seems archaic. But still his advice concerning avoiding haste, attempting to ensure the break is amicable, and maintaining the element of love for a former friend, are theological responses that reflect the grace that Christians experience in Jesus and can be demonstrated in practice. Convenience is again a recognizable good in being able to maintain the number of connections possible through Facebook. It also recognizes a value in efficiency that allows more time to focus on significant relationships. This was reflected in the practices of some of the young adult Christians in the study who systematically deleted Facebook friendships with those they no longer were in contact with or wished to read about on Facebook. That some young adult Christians indicated being hurt by a Facebook-friend deletion, struggle with deleting a Facebook-friend, or consciously choose to retain connections for the possibility of future relationship development, indicates that they continue to be engaged in discussing and reflecting on the nature and importance of relationships and their own responses to others. This is typical of questions that are not easily answered in the same way for every young adult Christian as they are continually being shaped by both cultural influences and theological perspectives. Keeping the discussion going will not result in a one-size-fits-all answer but may be the best way to ensure continued reflection and responses that are discerning and intentional.

5.3.5 Outcome to the encounters relating to persistence in friendship – discernment

Christians believe that God created a good world, which both believers and non-believers inhabit. Friendships are good because they contain characteristics that reflect the nature of the one in whose image man was created. These characteristics include: mutual desire for the good of the other as well as mutual care, trust, and respect. Some people will only know of

God through the good they experience in the world, including the good that results from friendship. So if genuine good is present in friendships between two non-Christians, or a Christian and a non-Christian, God's glory is reflected and can be discerned by Christians. Young adult Christians can continue to engage with others and with theological perspectives using questions such as the following in their reflection on their Facebook, friendship and faith practices in terms of discernment in persistence in their friendships.

How are my friendships with other Christians mutually helpful in following and growing closer to Christ?

What are theologically sound reasons to maintain connections with people at all levels of friendship?

5.4 Encounter Conclusion

The task to 'mediate the relation between the Christian tradition and the specific problems and challenges of the contemporary social context' (Swinton and Mowat 2006, 26) is the task described by Niebuhr as the 'enduring problem' and continuously addressed by theologians from a variety of perspectives. Methods of practical theology allow for the examination of theories and assumptions, with an eye towards the development of practices that are faithful at multiple levels.

The framework for and descriptions of friendship provided by Aelred are aligned with the levels of friendship identified by young adult Christians as Facebook, friendship and faith practices encounter each other regarding originations and persistence in friendship. Findings from the situational analysis and the theological perspectives that relate to the Categories of Friends model direct the encounter of practices in the origination of friendship for young adult Christians as they are influenced by both their context and theology. Similarly, the encounter of the practices as related to the persistence of friendship uses findings considered in the Levels of Friendship model. The outcomes of intention and discernment from engagement in analysis regarding origination and persistence in friendship are practical responses that can be used for connecting the practices of Facebook, friendship and faith. Table 5.4 depicts outcomes related to the activity of encounter regarding the themes of origination and persistence in friendship.

TABLE 5.4.

Activity	Model	Theme	Outcome
Encounter	Categories of Friends	Origination of friendship	Intention
	Levels of Friendship	Persistence in friendship	Discernment

These outcomes may be difficult to realize because encounters are not often characterized by recognition of broad dichotomies based on universally agreed upon truths. Encounters of young adult Christians are not limited to nor dominated by interactions within a strong Christian colony. For many young adult Christians, the faith environment may be more of a retreat than a dwelling place. It may be somewhere they are on Sunday morning or one weekday night. Although a common understanding of faith in Christ may be presumed when in the company of Christian friends, it may not be apparent as the prevailing environment. The concept of a Christian culture is an ideal type but young adult Christians operate in a world of multiple contexts and influences in which the Christian faith is one of many. Based on this research, to assume that their practices are compelled by a discretely identifiable Christian culture is untrue or unrealistic. But neither are their practices the sole product of any other clearly defined cultural influence. In fact, some authors argue that traditional ideas of culture may be inadequate or an incorrect description of the situation, stipulating the existence of inherent conflict and that the value of confrontation may be more useful. This is the premise that will be utilized in the next section as encounter moves to engagement of Facebook, friendship and faith practices.

5.5 Engagement: Theoretical Framework for the Engagement of Practices of Facebook, Friendship and Faith

The analysis moves from encounter to engagement as the issues for reflection change from practices linked to the more structured models to practices linked to the two remaining models. The Posting Frequency and Disclosure model and the Types of Posts model represent the more relational or organic aspects of friendship. Consideration of engagement of the practices based on these models makes the argument:

Facebook, friendship and faith practices of young adult Christians engage through witness and mission to realize that outcomes of affirmation and demonstration provide a voice of theology heard through social media.

The Posting Frequency and Disclosure model brings out social and cultural issues of identity in friendship to engage with the theological considerations of Christ demonstrating friendship. The question asked in both contexts is, ‘What do we come to know through friendship?’ Based on the analyses from the Types of Posts model, consumerism can engage with a theological notion of friendship with God. Young adult Christians might reflect on the question, ‘How does friendship matter?’ as they see their Facebook, friendship and faith practices connecting. The themes emerging from engagement of Facebook, friendship and faith practices based on these two models are witness and mission, depicted in Table 5.5.

TABLE 5.5.

Activity	Model	Question	Social/Cultural Considerations	Theological Considerations	Theme
Engagement	Posting Frequency and Disclosure	What do we come to know through friendship?	Identity	Christ demonstrating friendship	Witness in friendship
	Types of Posts	How does friendship matter?	Consumerism	Friendship with God	Mission through friendship

The understanding of what culture is has changed and continues to evolve according to Bauman and Tanner. Bauman reminds us that the term ‘culture’ was originally a declaration of intent, invoking a call to action such as cultivating a field to improve its usefulness (Bauman 2011, 7). Over time, culture came to be associated with beauty and exclusivity, moving from being understood as an agent of change to that of a set of functions. Bauman finds that an understanding of culture as a fixed set of meaningful practices gave way as society transformed from modernity to the current period, which he defines as liquid modernity:

What makes modernity ‘liquid’, and thus justifies the choice of name, is its self-propelling, self-intensifying, compulsive and obsessive ‘modernization’, as a result of

which, like liquid, none of the consecutive forms of social life is able to maintain its shape for long. (Bauman 2011, 11)

The work of contemporary theologian Kathryn Tanner also provides a thought-provoking discussion on the understanding of culture, its modern meaning, and its position in relation to theology. She points out that traditional understandings of culture have an interpretation that stresses autonomy, unity, and the meaning of social practices (Tanner 1997, 38). Theologically, this is exemplified by Niebuhr where the question is about two competing sources of authority – Christ and every other, especially secular or civil authority. Differentiating an anthropological sense of culture, she identifies the postmodern revisionist interpretation of culture as unbounded, porous, and containing multiple centres vying for the power of identity (Tanner 1997, 58), not unlike the liquid form described by Bauman. Cultures are not unified wholes or pure cultures in this model; all are inherently moving, adjusting, and open to various interpretations. In this understanding, human agency is recovered within the tendency towards determinism. As Tanner describes it:

The post-modern anthropologist can still consider culture an essentially consensus building feature of group living. That consensus becomes, however, extremely minimalistic; it forms the basis for conflict as much as it forms the basis for shared beliefs and sentiments. Whether or not culture is a common focus of agreement, culture binds people together as a common focus for engagement. (Tanner 1997, 57)

Tanner finds that instead of culture playing a role of consensus building, it is the basis for engagement. Engagement or argument thus become key concepts for multiple cultures and cultural influences existing together. She takes this model of the progression of culture and applies it to theological understandings (Tanner 1997, 80). She cautions that it is a mistake to presume that Christians are ever able to operate in a pure Christian culture like the colony perspective of Hauerwas and Willimon. She recognizes that Christianity is itself a cultural product:

...one does not first determine a distinctively Christian message or lens for viewing the world and then bring it, subsequently, into relation with other culture practice for, say, apologetic purposes. Those other cultural practices are there from the beginning as the materials out of which the very Christian message or lens is constructed. ... A kind

of apologetics or polemics with other cultures is internal, then, to the very construction of Christian sense. (Tanner 1997, 116)

She affirms that Christians have different styles within their own cultural experiences. Thus it is not what Christians do but how do they do it that makes the difference. In other words, there is no single Christian culture; there are different contexts, different understandings of Christianity, all residing among other cultural identities and influences. Her emphasis is then on accepting the different contexts within Christianity, recognizing their place among other cultures, and using that understanding in engaging with others.

Facebook itself is not a culture but is perhaps better described as an ethos, a way of engaging with others, and is something adapted and used differently for different situations. Young adult Christians, as they practise friendship on Facebook, are wrestling with different influences as they are figuring out what it means to be a 'young adult', a 'Christian', and a 'friend'. Reflection on the encounter of Facebook practices with other friendship and with faith practices results in intention and discernment in its use – but to what end? Using Tanner's understanding, Christians must not just encounter but engage.

If engagement is witness to the way of being Christian, mission is the way of fulfilling what Christians understand they are called to do. Witness is a starting point for engaging with others to take an understanding of God's Word into the world as he commands. Mission is the vehicle of engagement for moving the faith forward in the world. Both are integral to connecting the practices of Facebook, friendship and faith of young adult Christians in expressions of affirmation and demonstration.

5.6 Engagement: Witness in knowing God through friendship – what we can come to know through friendship

Facebook, friendship and faith practices engage through witness over issues of identity, disclosure, and commitment discussed in both the situational and theological analyses. The early Christian church described by Luke was comprised of believers of different social and economic background (Stark 1996; Mitchell 1992). They shared resources and meals as they wrestled with understanding who Jesus was, what had happened in his life and death, what he had tried to teach them – all while gathering to worship and witness to the God from whom he came. Jesus' message was radical and counter-cultural; following him was dangerous. The

expected conventions of friendship did not apply as they formed a colony committed to a common purpose of spreading God's message to the world that did not see or understand what Jesus' followers saw and believed. The common purpose connects Christians through the centuries as a result of the church preserving scripture and tradition. The church witnesses to the message as it can be understood by those practising the faith and interpreted by theologians.

Hauerwas and Willimon recognize in the church an alternative way of viewing the world. Calling the *confessing church* a 'radical alternative', they describe it witnessing as follows:

The confessing church seeks the *visible* church, a place clearly visible to the world, in which people are faithful to their promises, love their enemies, tell the truth, honor the poor, suffer for righteousness, and thereby testify to the amazing community-creating power of God. (Hauerwas and Willimon 1989, 46)

Thus, according to this argument of *Resident Aliens* and the considerable body of work by Hauerwas, Christian identity is found in the practices and clear demarcation of God's people, not in debate or apologetics (Hauerwas and Wells 2011, 37). Instead of 'Christianizing culture' God's people need to focus on worshiping God, eating with God through communion, and being friends of God through prayer and fellowship with other Christians. God has provided the gifts to enable this through the meaning found in the Eucharist, in Baptism, and through the Holy Spirit (Hauerwas and Wells 2011). Worship is a series of practices that witness to who he is and identifies who his people are.

If, as Tanner advances, there is not a single Christian culture but various contexts and different interpretations of Christianity (Tanner 1997, 94ff.), then Christians encounter and engage in other ways in addition to witnessing through practices, as Hauerwas advocates. It is not necessary to establish new traditions or new rules or even to insist on going back to old traditions and old rules. The alternative as she states it is:

Finally, a reachable goal of great value is simply the strengthening of the bonds of Christian fellowship. Through the ongoing practice of choosing dialogue over monologue, there emerges a strengthening of the commitment to search for the meaning of Christian discipleship together, with both seriousness about the stakes and an eagerness to make something good come of conflict. (Tanner 1997, 175)

For Tanner, Christianity is more about a way of being than it is a settled condition (Tanner 1997, 151ff.). Tanner's model does not suggest a hostile environment in which friendship is not possible but instead supports the engagement, encounter, and connection process as an appropriate way of realizing friendship for young adult Christians. In fact what she describes as conflict can be interpreted as the engagement that is possible through and important to friendship and manifests itself as witness and mission. Using this approach allows moving away from a Christ and culture clash and focusing instead on a practical way of being a Christian who engages with others in the world. Participation in contemporary friendship practices involves young adult Christians witnessing to their faith as they engage with others in challenging, articulating, reflecting, and openness to revising practices. As Tanner describes it, it is through engagement with others in a process of discovery that a Christian is reflecting their response to the Gospel message.

Hauerwas agrees with Tanner's point regarding the importance of engagement for Christians when he discusses confrontation as a means to peace (Hauerwas 2001, 318–26). He describes the application of Christian friendship as practice in the activities of confrontation, reconciliation and peacemaking. Confrontation by a Christian is contingent on the understanding of our own lives as forgiven and redeemed by God. In such an understanding, confrontation leads to peacemaking, not options of either further conflict or forgetting. This is an example of witness through engagement with Christian theological perspectives. In a pluralistic society, engagement may challenge the premise of the faith but the practice can realize responses of witness and affirmation. The views of friendship discussed by Cocking and Kennett perhaps provide a framework for applying concepts of engagement as witness in friendship.

5.6.1 *Revelation and recognition as witness in friendship*

Practices of Facebook, friendship and faith can engage over issues of identity asking, 'what do we come to know of ourselves and each other in friendship?' The social/cultural contexts realize recognition in friendship. The theological perspective looks for Christ to be revealed through Christians in friendship. The *mirror view* of friendship that recognizes a self-love we share with another, identified by Aristotle, was considered in Cocking and Kennett's analysis of friendship (Cocking and Kennett 1998). In an engagement of practices, the *mirror view* can be challenged theologically as being ego-centric rather than God-centred. Yet a desire to be friends with others who are like oneself is compatible with the theological friendships

described by Lewis (Lewis 1977). Defining one's own identity and recognizing mutual interests in another are elements in the basis for friendship. But if, as Bauman suggests, the goal in contemporary times is to remain fluid even in matters of identity, inconsistency and the inability to commit may well be the result (Bauman 2003). Both characteristics are counter to a theological tradition of friendship revealing the nature of God as consistent and committed.

An interpretation of identity in relation to a context or group is consistent with a theological value of proclaiming one's belief in Christ through recognition as a Christian and association with others known as the body of Christ. On Facebook, disclosure occurs through identification with and participation in Christian groups and activities, the content of posts, 'Likes', comments, and responses to others. An impression formed from presentation, disclosure and response on Facebook is only one dimension of social interaction. It is not likely to fully represent how a person understands who they are in relation to Christ. Practices grounded in both cultural influences and the faith traditions are evident in relationship activities, but neither fully defines a Christian.

Two manifestations of identity converge for young adult Christians in a Facebook identity and their Christian identity. The Facebook identity is a product of the owner's creation, shaped through its construction and developed through recognition and responses of others. A Facebook Identity is understood as just one component in a porous cultural context. Practices emerging from various cultural influences will have an impact on the practice of faith traditions even when Christianity is significant to one's identity. But practices reflecting the faith tradition can also impact the various cultural environments. Young adult Christians are witnessing as they engage with others to reveal and be recognized as Christians in their Facebook, friendship and faith practices. When one is recognized as a Christian, they bear witness to one's faith.

5.6.2 *Sharing and disclosure as witness in friendship*

Practices of Facebook, friendship and faith engage regarding sharing and disclosure quite differently in the social and theological contexts. Self-disclosure and reciprocity of divulgence are key elements of engagement. In a social context for friendship these elements correlate to Cocking and Kennett's description of the *secrets view* of friendship (Cocking and Kennett 1998). With the use of social media, it seems easy to make oneself known to others. Posting personal information on Facebook provides instant access to as much intimate detail as an

individual wishes to share or what others reveal about them. Even information not explicitly stated can be inferred from posted photos, activities, and comments. Anything posted can be taken at face value, or meaning can be discerned from analysis in connection with other signals or interactions. Disclosure theory affirms that ‘back-stage’ behaviour described by Goffman may be the genuine indicator of character, through it is often not made apparent in ‘front-stage’ performances (Goffman 1959). Goffman’s theorizing related to physical relationships preceded practices of forming digital identities so they may not be adequate to describe current possibilities. For example, posting and managing photos is now another way to control one’s image and can result in limited or inaccurate disclosure. More accurate information may be revealed through observing on Facebook the actions of association, activities, content of posts, ‘Liking’, and responses than what is explicitly stated. In a sense it is providing the equivalent of a behind the scenes commentary. Yet digital media inherently offer a limited expression of an individual, which can intentionally or inadvertently cause distortion. Reciprocity may then be skewed as a result of interpretation of the disclosure. Thus friendship based on self-disclosure and reciprocity of divulgence will very likely require more sharing than can be provided solely through Facebook or other social media if it is not an accurate source of disclosure.

A Facebook-friend list as a source of disclosure (Utz 2010) may also be an indicator of identity and could have some significance in terms of witness. Jesus’ list of friends included his disparate disciples, Mary Magdalene, Lazarus and his sisters, and Zacchaeus. He made friends with many that others shunned or deemed unworthy by expressing God’s love to them, caring for the individual, and also witnessing to others by his actions. In disclosure of who one is through one’s friendships, Christians can be witnessing to Jesus’ examples of befriending others based on God’s love for them. Or from a social/cultural perspective, they might be demonstrating an indiscriminate use of Facebook in their Friendship practices.

Realizing significance in everyday practices, such as occur within friendship, can provide the type of engagement that results from sharing at a deep level. Christians disclose who they are by purposely engaging more fully with others as well as with their own spiritual sensibilities. Borgmann argues that reliance on technology stifles appreciation for activities that provide more opportunities for embodied engagement and the fulfillment they provide (Borgmann 1984, 196–210). To counter social/cultural influences, he identifies and defines ‘focal things’ and ‘focal practices’:

Focal things and practices are the crucial counterforces to technology understood as a form of culture. They contrast with technology without denying it, and they provide a standpoint for a principled and fruitful reform of technology. Generally, a focal thing is concrete and of commanding presence. A focal practice is the decided, regular, and normally communal devotion to a focal thing. (Borgmann 2003, 22)

Awareness of the effect that technology has in one's life and taking time for reflection on theological values helps to establish balance in allowing devices to serve a useful purpose while not usurping time that can be otherwise spent in meaningful ways. The response in engagement of sharing and disclosure by the church is not to try to improve or to change practices to satisfy the contemporary cultures. Instead, Christians can situate their essential Christian practices in the centre of their lives, allowing other practices to be shaped around them, and in so doing witness clearly to what is most important. Engaging with others through sharing and disclosure in friendship is perhaps the most practical and achievable demonstration of witness.

5.6.3 *Adaption and sacrifice as witness in friendship*

Neither the presentation of identity as described by the *mirror view*, nor the sharing of personal matters as depicted in the *secrets view*, are at the level of friendship described in the *drawing view* discussed by Cocking and Kennett (see section 3.4.3) or corresponding to Aelred's description of Spiritual Friendship. In a social context, the type of adaptations one is willing to make for a friend as exemplified by the *drawing view* might involve trading a night at a sporting event for a night at the theatre. This is done in anticipation of better appreciating the interests of a friend and growing together in mutual participation and enjoyment. However for Christians to sustain and grow a relationship according to the guidelines provided by Aelred, more commitment and sacrifice are required. Theologically, commitment to a friend involves willingness to sacrifice in service to them, even if it is not convenient. In doing so, friendship itself becomes a witness.

Jesus' sacrifice of his life for the sins of others and his being raised from the dead is the defining theology of Christianity. Christians try to comprehend that in commanding his followers to love as he loves, he is asserting that sacrificial love is possible for mankind. He is not commanding the sacrifice of life; in fact his act justifies all people for all time. But in commanding the same kind of love, he says that his followers are capable of it and expects it

to be demonstrated by those to whom he has been made known and with whom he shared knowledge of his Father – his friends.

The types of sacrifices that are publicized are often that of a family member or friend providing a body organ in a transplant, or a person risking their life for a stranger in a dangerous situation. These actions are considered extraordinary since they are not the type of responses that occur in the normal course of activity. The ultimate responsibility is usually viewed as preserving oneself, perhaps justified as a necessity for being in a position to provide for others and be a contributing member of society. By some standards, to compromise the possibilities of future gain or benefit for the greater good appears foolish compared to the relatively insignificant effect of a sacrifice for one individual or friend. A more commonly sanctioned and understood type of sacrifice that provides an issue for engagement in contemporary contexts is that of time.

In most economies, time is a precious resource – not to be squandered but to be used efficiently to produce maximum results for the investment. In a theological understanding, time is a precious gift – given to be used in worship and in furthering God’s kingdom. In a consumer society, the sacrifice of time is often difficult to offer because it is viewed as a limited commodity. Time spent in just being with another, not producing a tangible benefit, can be viewed as either wasteful or precious depending on the outlook. The impact of the sacrifice of time may appear to be only marginal but in fact it could be very significant, even life-giving, to the recipient of the attention. The recognition of that person as someone of value and worthy of time, reflects the time and attention that God has for each of his children. And if reciprocity is an integral element of friendship, the befriended elderly or disabled person is providing the opportunity to give of oneself to another for no practical gain but in response to God’s goodness and mercy. Thus sacrifice is not only possible but can occur in ways other than martyrdom through friendship practices that benefit others and witness to God as the giver of time.

5.6.4 Outcome to engagement of witness in friendship – affirmation

In Figure 5.3 we see young adult Christians residing in arenas of both cultural influences and their faith traditions. The research indicated that important characteristics of the culture are convenience and connection. Values of faith are commandment and commitment. Facebook, friendship and faith practices of young adult Christians are effected by both cultural influences

and faith perspectives as they engage regarding the elements of friendship described in this analysis.

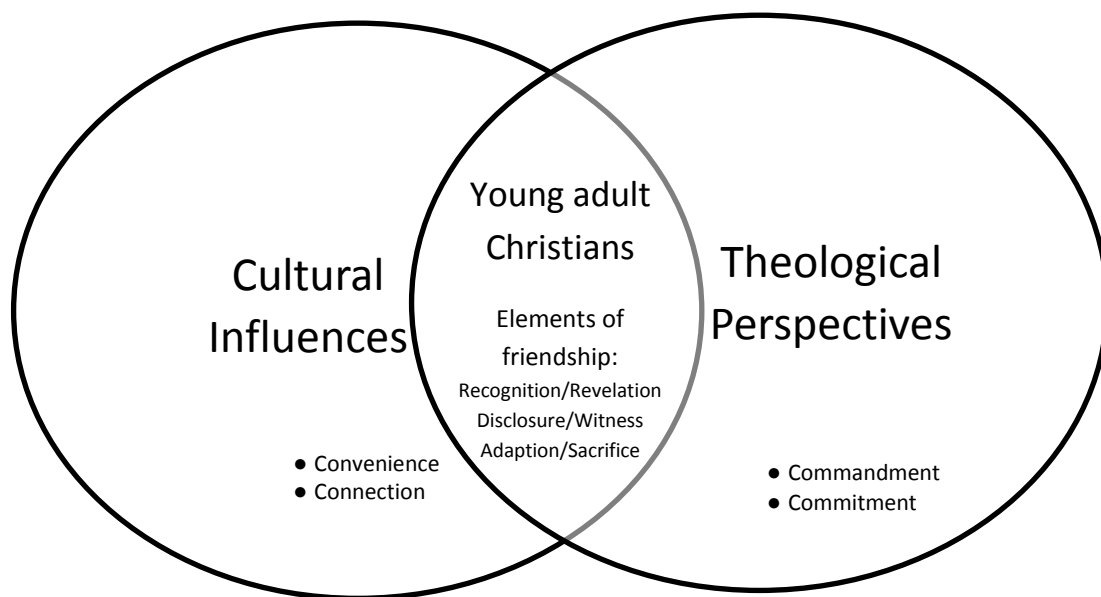


FIGURE 5.3.

Cultural influences and faith engage with and challenge each other in the experience of practising friendship. Friendship practices can stay grounded in Christian values of commandment and commitment in friendship while responding to cultural demands for connection and convenience by recognizing the centrality of Christianity to identity. Aspects of friendship understood in the situational contexts can be considered theologically by young adult Christians by reconsidering elements of friendship in ways that affirm who they believe in and how they respond.

Social theory identifies the roles of recognition, disclosure, and adaption in friendship (Cocking and Kennett 1998, 502–03). Although not an exact conversion, Christian theological perspectives could interpret those concepts as revelation, witness, and sacrifice, described in the following ways:

Recognition = Christ revealed in one’s own Christian identity, through God’s continuing story, and in recognizing Christ in others.

Disclosure = Witness, to who one is as a Christian and as part of God’s church functioning within the world.

Adaption = Sacrifice for a friend, in order to be the friend Christ taught his followers to be.

A danger that Hauerwas recognizes is that Christians are failing to be aware of the significance of their practices and thus not realizing that they are continually witnessing to their beliefs through their everyday activities such as friendship (Hauerwas 2001, 114). By connecting cultural understandings of friendship in terms of recognition, disclosure, and adaption, to theological understandings of revelation, witness, and sacrifice, young adult Christians can understand friendship as a means of affirming who God is and who they are as Christians.

Young adult Christians can use questions such as the following in reflection on their friendship practices in terms of witness, as they attempt to integrate or move towards more conscious affirmation of their beliefs and Christian identity in their engagement with others.

How do I know God and how do I make myself known to others?

Who do I say Christ is and why is that relevant to my practices of friendship, including Facebook?

Christians practise friendship through engagement, participation, reflection, revision – all dimensions that are incorporated in worship, as well as witnessing to who God is and who his people are. Hauerwas emphasizes the importance of the church focusing on being the church (Hauerwas and Willimon 1989, 94; Hauerwas 1981, 110). If he makes it sound simple enough to follow, history and experience tell us that it is difficult to accomplish and a large enough task to completely occupy Christians in every generation. Tanner helps us to understand how witness to the Christian faith involves active engagement with others (Tanner 1997, 156ff.) and we see how encounter through friendship can lead to connection in practices. The next section extends the affirmation of witness as it is demonstrated in mission: what being the church is about and is called to do.

5.7 Engagement: Mission in sharing God in friendship – how friendship matters

Facebook, friendship and faith practices can engage through mission, which is demonstrated in examples of sharing God in friendship. In the situational analysis related to the Types of Posts model, finding and using multiple ways of staying connected to friends was seen as a product of a consumerist culture. Consumerism was established as being both a cause and result of the

high value placed on convenience demanded for connection. Friendship through Facebook delivers on all accounts: connection, convenience, consumerism. Friends can be conveniently connected via a variety of means of communication. Yet through the course of reflection on these analyses, we have discovered that friendship for young adult Christians is more than the sum of the parts as defined by the various contexts in which they engage in friendship. That is, friendship is more than having numerous communication choices about how to be conveniently connected to others. In engagement of the theories behind the practices, young adult Christians reflect on how their friendships can matter. Christians understand that answering 'what matters?' is mission.

The theological analysis of the Types of Posts model focused on Aquinas' recognition that God's movement towards his creation is the initial act of friendship, further demonstrated by Jesus, and enabled through the Holy Spirit. Being in friendship with God precedes and makes possible friendship with others. In this understanding, friendship need not be defined based on shared faith, pleasure, or utility but on the *caritas* extended from God to and among all people. It is fully realized in good will and charity. Practices of friendship result in mission, which can be seen exemplified in many ways, such as through hospitality and friendship with those who hold theological perspectives different from one's own.

David J. Bosch traces the Christian and cultural schism back to the Enlightenment claim that God could be ignored without consequence. He found that Catholic theology was better able to reconcile reason and nature through the approach of Aquinas which may be seen as corresponding to Niebuhr's description of Christ above Culture. Reformation theology carried the idea of an abiding incompatibility between two distinct realms – God's and all other (Bosch 1995, 16–17). This led to the approaches identified in Niebuhr's typology as either Christ against Culture or Christ in Paradox with Culture, and a need for Christ transforming Culture. An understanding in Protestantism of a fundamental schism created situations where Christians used different plausibility structures depending on the arena in which they were operating (Bosch 1995, 16–18). The faith structure and the mechanistic paradigm operated as separate dimensions. Mission is an area of practical theology that addresses this schism, as well as cultural differences, in seeking to understand and undertake the mission of the church in contemporary times.

Mission draws on theology, anthropology, and history in order to effectively engage with others of a different or no religion. Various contexts are encountered and engaged with while

grasping an understanding of being faithful to Christianity's own tradition and call. Tanner opened our eyes to the impossibility of a 'pure culture' (Tanner 1997); Bosch alerts us that the same may be said about the gospel as a result of cultural influences. 'The gospel always comes to people in cultural robes. There is no such thing as a "pure" gospel, isolated from culture' (Bosch 1991, 297). Young adult Christians engaging in mission through friendship with others must first grapple with the challenging concept of being in friendship with God, all within the cultural context in which they know him.

5.7.1 *Mission through friendship with God*

The idea of being in friendship with God is challenging to both Christians and a non-believing culture because the concept itself seems impossible. For Christians it is impossible on the basis of equality and to the non-believing culture the difficulty is the basis of proof. If disclosure, sharing, and reciprocity are required for friendship, these understandings challenge the concept of being in friendship with one who is not seen, heard, touched, and may not even exist. A consumerist society deals in products and tangible goods, thus relies on evidence, even of relationships. Yet with the communication offered through digital technologies, people do enter into relationship with others who they do not actually see, hear, or know. It is possible to view photos, hear voices, and share thoughts with someone who may be representing themselves fictitiously or who has wholly created an identity. When the truth becomes known, the consequences can be devastating. So, although relationships can be maintained without sensory contact, it is not surprising that there is apprehension and doubt about a relationship of this nature.

Christians endorse sharing of one's joys, sorrows, cares, concerns, as integral to friendship while recognizing that means are not restricted to face-to-face conversation. For example, the written word has long been an effective means of reflection and sharing, whether in reference to scripture, letter writing, or now digitally. Christian doctrine states that man was created specifically to be in relationship with God, thus friendship with God should not be an implausible notion but rather an expectation (Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Assembly 1647, Question 1). Characteristics of close friends are strikingly similar to the characteristics that are attributed to God. God is ever-present and compassionate. He desires company, loves and delights, knows and wants the best, and forgives. Further, he provides the way to redemption to him at great pain and cost. God acting towards his creation exemplifies friendship. For a Christian in friendship with God, sharing occurs through scripture,

contemplation, prayer, liturgy, sacraments, and fellowship with other Christians. Christians have experiences of seeing, hearing, feeling God, and proving himself to be a friend.

Still, for Christians trying to grasp friendship with God, the divine otherness of God is always held in juxtaposition with the humanness of God known through Jesus. While vigorously propounding the concept of humans in friendship with God, Aquinas' theology indicates his understanding that it is a supernatural friendship of which the earthly experience cannot be exactly the same. Important aspects to the concept of friendship with God are both equality and friendship's basis in grace. From John 15:15, Aquinas understands the equality in friendship as conferred by Jesus. He explains, 'Charity signifies not only the love of God, but also a certain friendship with Him; which implies, besides love, a certain mutual return of love, together with mutual communion' (Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II:65.5). Friendship with God is possible because Jesus made it so by his grace. It was not earned or deserved, but Jesus made his disciples his friends through his honest disclosure to them and his sharing with them. Following Jesus' death and resurrection, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit enables a continuation of the relationship of friendship with God that Jesus began with his disciples and friends. The sacrament of communion is a tangible and visible reminder of that relationship that binds all Christians through the ages to their Creator God.

The importance of the practice of the Eucharist and worship to friendship with God is discussed by Hauerwas:

God also wants God's people to be God's friends. ... The word that best expresses this friendship is companion – one who shares bread. The principal eschatological image of the Gospels is the banquet. The image of the great feast declares that God longs for God's people to worship God in a friendship that is embodied in eating together. Christians practice this longing when they habitually and faithfully share the Eucharist. In the Eucharist they recognize that God wants them to worship God, to be God's friends, and to eat with God. (Hauerwas and Wells 2011, 16)

Difficulty in realizing the relationship with God in terms of friendship can result from expectations for equality in reciprocity, but those expectations do not apply to Christians in friendship with God. God can set the terms because he is God. What is asked of his people is simple in concept but difficult in practice and has had to be repeated many times and in many ways throughout history and the course of the relationship. In the Old Testament, God's

requirements are summarized as, 'Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God' (Micah 6:8). When Jesus is asked what the most important commandment is, he replies, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and love your neighbour as yourself' (Mark 12:30–31). The responses, though separated by hundreds of years, are consistent in addressing the importance of relationship to both God and to others. In ancient and contemporary times, love of neighbour is demonstrated through mission and one way it is exemplified is in the extension of hospitality through friendship.

5.7.2 Extending friendship as mission

If, as Hauerwas insists, Christians are their own community of believers, living in a hostile world waiting for the new creation, it would be easier and more comfortable to just close ranks and to try to maintain the colony with believers. Why take on a task of engaging with or entertaining strangers and those who are best kept at a distance? Not everyone accepts invitations extended in hospitality, and not all that do will respond in ways that the host considers appropriate. But neither response denigrates the gift extended. Christians understand themselves as invited guests of a holy God: unclean, unworthy, but welcomed nonetheless. In doing likewise for others in friendship practices ranging from preparing to receive a disabled person into a congregation, organizing a Christmas dinner at the Salvation Army, welcoming immigrants into a community, engaging in friendship with a person of another faith, to posting on Facebook, God's holiness prevails.

Practices of friendship demonstrated by hospitality are well suited to the cultural environment that is familiar to young adult Christians. Extending hospitality may be only slightly inconvenient when compared to the time required for investing in a deeper relationship of friendship. The results from the hospitality also provide a feeling of connectedness, in the immediate sense as well as in the possibilities it opens up for further interactions. The postmodern life strategies described by Bauman (Bauman 1995) may typify types of people for whom hospitality and friendship could be extended. Although the *stroller* is moving playfully through life, he is observing. Extension of hospitality at the right time could provide the opportunity for engagement that has previously been avoided. The *vagabond* has no destination or home but could find the place for which he was created in the midst of Christian hospitality. The *tourist* may be on a journey but can return home refreshed and replenished by the hospitality of God's gracious love. A *player* thrives on the game, the challenge and the win. If hospitality introduces him to a whole new game of life, where knowing and being in

relationship with God is the ultimate prize, the victory may be far better than he ever imagined.

A Christian theology of hospitality is one of holiness and witness, not charity or social justice, although those may be visible and positive social outcomes. Mission through hospitality can be enacted in many ways, including personal demonstrations of friendship. Practising friendship with a stranger is a form of hospitality when 'friendship with a stranger' appears to be a contradiction of terms. In a pluralistic world, platforms advocating for ideas such as 'multi-culturalism' and 'tolerance' are considered politically correct. So by those standards the general idea of inter-religious friendship is lauded as progressive as a means to understanding and peace. However, the plausibility or idealism of a Christian encouraging, seeking or investing in an inter-religious friendship on a personal level is challenging to a convenience-orientated society. This is a questionable challenge when it is deemed normal to maintain Facebook-friends lists numbering in the hundreds, most of whom are likely to be practically strangers. Yet friendship with strangers, even recognizing the stranger within friends, provides different interests and stimulates the imagination to look at oneself and the world differently. In friendship, we take another person seriously, which includes seeking to understand what they value and why. An inter-religious friendship is a striking example of an opportunity for both recommitment and mission.

Engaging with others of different or no faith is the essence of mission but is challenging. History and experience prove that simply sharing the Christian gospel does not result in immediate and wholehearted understanding, agreement or acceptance. Many questions arise about the nature and purposes of God and Jesus, Christianity, the church, and the life of a Christian. Further challenges may develop when others question if scripture, theology, and tradition, are telling the whole story. There are challenges to the patriarchal foundation of the faith, historical and cultural hierarchy, power structures, and gender issues resulting from embedded predominantly male perspectives. These are authentic and valid questions, not limited to those outside the faith. They are representative of the type of questioning that develops into theological movements such as liberationist and feminist theologies. Christianity benefits from these encounters and challenges by responding with critical examination and theological reflection of additional issues and practices. The further extension of the engagement is the application of the theories to contemporary experiences of Christian life.

Engagement through friendship is a missiological task that is expressed through demonstration.

5.7.3 Outcome to engagement: Friendship as mission – demonstration

God moved towards humankind in friendship. Humans move towards others as an extension of that act of God towards them. Friendship with God is a mystery that cannot be understood by man but can be accepted and practised by Christians, through reflection on scripture, prayer, history, tradition, fellowship, and ultimately faith.

Some people, while lauding the principle, would question why certain difficult friendships would be undertaken. A pluralistic society recognizes that everyone has one's own right to their beliefs and is suspicious that the motive for inconvenient or inter-religious friendships is conversion, rather than demonstrating a calling or acceptance of informed co-existence. Christians are challenged in engagement but challenges can lead to increased understanding, new approaches, strengthened faith, and renewed commitment to a calling in Christ.

Young adult Christians can use the following types of questions in their reflection on their friendship practices in terms of their understanding of their calling in Christ as mission:

Can my relationship with God be one of friendship? How does that affect my understanding of friendship with others?

Are my friendship practices a faithful response to my understanding of God's command to me to love one another and to go therefore and make disciples of all men?

Friendships extended through hospitality as response to being in friendship with God are demonstrations of a personal theology that reflects where young adult Christians are being shaped, how they engage with others, and why they are a witness to their understanding of their faith in mission.

5.8 Engagement conclusion

The work of several contemporary theologians was used in the development of the issues of engagement. In Hauerwas and Willimon explaining how Christian practices of worship and virtue shape believers and define the community, we recognized witness as a result of

formation. Schultze and Borgmann discuss the impact of the culture of technology and argue for the importance of the development of specific habits and acts of worship in a technological age, which also manifest as witness. These approaches indicate that certain behaviours shaped by intentional formation identify and delineate the gospel in practice. It is not likely that Tanner would deny the importance of formation but her theory of culture suggests that is it less about specific ways of doing things and more about thinking of what friendship means, especially as its practices appear to change with technology. But a challenge to Tanner's approach is to ask: Are we always to be involved in engaging with no expectation of coming to a conclusion or making connections? And further, could this be interpreted to mean that the Gospel has multiple versions, no definitive truth? A response to these questions as a reaction in the encounter requires serious personal reflection.

The thinking of young adult Christians is affected by their own experiences of observing inconsistencies in behaviours and practices among Christians as well as hearing different opinions on social and political issues among those within the same church. Beyond the church, they are part of a globalized world among others who do not believe in the same or perhaps any God. They may be questioned or themselves question a faith built on the short ministry of a first century young Jewish man who practiced and seemed to encourage martyrdom. Engagement is essential as a way of connecting in knowing God, witnessing through friendship, and demonstrating that it matters through mission.

Using methods of practical theology, this study finds that engagement between the practices of Facebook, friendship and faith is realized through witness and mission in friendship. These actions can lead to outcomes of affirmation and demonstration, shown in Table 5.6.

TABLE 5.6.

Activity	Model	Theme	Outcome
Engagement	Posting Frequency and Disclosure	Witness in friendship	Affirmation
	Types of Posts	Mission through friendship	Demonstration

Witness begins with knowing God and friendship through Christ. Witness occurs through practices, engagement, recognition, disclosure, and adaption in friendship. Mission is the essence of the church, demonstrating that our faith matters. Mission is achieved through first accepting friendship with God, then in the extension of friendship towards others. When practices of Facebook, friendship and faith engage through witness and mission, they connect to provide a voice of theology heard through social media.

5.9 Conclusion to the encounter and engagement of Facebook, friendship and faith practices chapter

This chapter is about practising friendship in contemporary contexts. Attending to young adult Christians' descriptions of how they use Facebook yields hints of the assumptions and values they embody in their practices. Their practices are positioned within developmental, social, cultural and technological contexts to identify where practices follow cultural influences and where they are counter-cultural. Bringing their value-laden practices into relation with theologies of friendship also provides perspective on the influences of the wider cultures reflected in their actions.

We view the encounter and engagement of practices brought together by this study as part of the conversation about what it means to be a young adult Christian, who values convenience and connection, in a time when technology, specifically Facebook, enables interactions, dialogue, and conflict.

Encounter and engagement of young adult Christians' practices of Facebook, friendship and faith as understood based on contextual situations and theological perspectives is summarized in table 5.7.

TABLE 5.7.

	Considerations	Theological Reflection	Outcome in Connection of Practices
Encounter	Origination of friendship	What is friendship?	Intention
	Persistence in friendships	How can I realize the purpose in each friendship?	Discernment
Engagement	Witness to knowing God	Who do I say He is and what difference does it make in my friendships?	Affirmation
	Mission of sharing God	What is my calling in friendship?	Demonstration

Assumptions and values embodied in Facebook friendship practices, are situated within particular social and technological contexts and within theological understandings of friendship. As the situational and theological perspectives encounter each other in considerations of issues related to origination and persistence in friendship, outcomes of intention and discernment in practices are suggested. The engagement of Facebook, friendship and faith themes emerging from the analysis lead to recognition of the integral position of witness and mission in the friendships of Christians. Functionally, intention and discernment combine in a voice of theology heard through social media by affirmation and demonstration. How this voice is made audible through the connection of practices of young adult Christians is discussed in the Revised Practices stage of using methods of practical theology.

Chapter 6. Connection – Revised Practices and Conclusion: Identifying Voices of Theology Expressed Through Social Media

Chapter Argument: Using methods of practical theology, revised practices of Facebook, friendship and faith of young adult Christians connect through intention, discernment, affirmation, and demonstration in a theological voice expressed through social media.

Chapter Introduction

Bringing Facebook, friendship and faith practices together provides opportunity for the issues from each analysis to encounter and engage. Reflection on situational and theological understandings regarding the origination and persistence of friendship can result in revised practices that are more intentional and discerning. When the practices encounter each other regarding issues of witness and mission, theological reflection can lead to affirmation and demonstration. Any of the practices may be revised as a result of young adult Christians considering friendship in more intentional, discerning ways as they realize that they are affirming and demonstrating their faith through their voice heard via social media.

The next phase in using methods of practical theology is to, in Larney's model, 'explore what response options are available to me in the light of what has gone before and make decisions as to the preferred one' (Larney 2000, 76). Swinton and Mowatt term this stage, 'revised forms of faithful practice' (Swinton and Mowat 2006, 95). Note that this is not considered the final stage because the process of practical theology is ongoing. Revised practices become the situations that can be identified as current praxis, themselves requiring reflection and critical challenge. The process that started with an encounter of descriptive aspects of the practices of Facebook, friendship and faith, progressed to engagement of the contexts and theologies that may be influencing the practices. The connection of the practices will be observed through consideration of options for revised practices.

In considering the response options available we will look at the applicability of two important theories in practical theology in relation to this analysis: Jeff Astley considers understandings of 'ordinary theology' and features of Theological Action Research (TAR) developed by the

Action Research: Church and Society (ARCS) team at Heythrop College, University of London. The voices of the young adult Christians are heard again in discussing several actual outcomes resulting from reflection on practices.

6.1 Theories of practical theology: Ordinary theology and the four voices of theology

With a scholarly development of the concept of ordinary theology, Astley legitimizes the importance of listening for the voice of young adult Christians as they learn, change, personalize, and express theological understandings. His book *Ordinary Theology*, while not focused specifically on young adults, reflects his extensive work as a theologian researching and writing in the areas of practical theology and Christian education (Astley 2002). As an educator, he first considers how people not trained as theologians, pick up, learn, and process theological ideas. He develops the context for learning theology along with establishing the centrality of the learner in the process. This research project does not include exploration of the theological learning process for the young adults in the study but is an example of taking ordinary theology seriously, as Astley advocates.

He identifies a twofold significance of ordinary theology. First, it is important because ‘the church needs to know about the beliefs, and patterns and processes of believing’ of its members (Astley and Francis 2013, 2). Secondly, and most importantly, it needs to be studied because for those who own it,

It fits their life experience and gives meaning to, and expresses the meaning they find within, their own lives. It is highly significant for *them* because it articulates a faith and a spirituality, and incorporates beliefs and ways of believing, that they find to be salvific – healing, saving, making them whole. Ordinary theology helps people spiritually and religiously. (Astley and Francis 2013, 2)

Astley applies the term ‘ordinary theology’ specifically to articulated expressions of one’s own theology, rather than what is inferred from behaviour (Astley and Francis 2013, 5). His use of the term ‘ordinary theology’ implies that we must be careful not to infer beliefs based on practices although practices may be presumed to reflect personal assumptions and values. Research that uses interviews and focus groups to ask questions about practices, prompts reflective thinking on the part of the participants. But it may not elicit ordinary theological

responses as they are described by Astley, as young adult Christians may still be in the processes of formulating, testing, and owning them (Astley 2002, 52–57).

This research indicated that the participants are not using theological terminology in their descriptions of their assumptions and values but they still may be reflecting theologically. TAR recognizes the importance of reflection in both practical theology and action research methodology as ‘responses to the difficulty of speaking about God in practice’ (Cameron et al. 2010, 49). Theological reflection can begin with individuals’ engagement in an activity or practice, rather than starting with scripture or tradition. In seeking to uncover both the situation with its problems and the presence of God in the midst of the circumstances, it aims for routes of transformation towards the goal of human flourishing (Cameron et al. 2012). Theological reflection is about something specific, which in this project are the friendship practices of young adult Christians engaging through Facebook. The intended outcome is fullness of living within personal contexts, by responding in faithfulness to a calling in Christ.

The practice of action research may be criticized due to lack of a sharp intellectual focus or failure to link to particular scientific discourse (Levin and Greenwood in Denzin and Lincoln 2011, 30). However based on numerous studies cited, Levin and Greenwood assert that action research can bridge practical problem-solving with well-developed theoretical and methodological agendas (Levin and Greenwood in Denzin and Lincoln 2011, 30). Due to the nature of a PhD research project, the purpose, scope and assembling of participants involved in this research project are different from the organizational structures in which TAR was developed and for which it was envisioned being implemented. But the ‘four voices’ description of theology derived from the ARCS project is a useful approach for exploring and describing the theological dimensions of the data gathered.

The four voices of theology are described and illustrated as follows:

- Operant theology—the theology embedded in the actual practices of a group (what we do).
- Espoused theology—the theology embedded in a group’s articulation of its beliefs (what we say we do).
- Normative theology—the theology the group names as authoritative and will allow to challenge its operant and espoused theologies.

- Formal theology—the theology of academic theologians and the dialogue with other disciplines. (Cameron et al. 2010, 53–55)



FIGURE 6.2. (Cameron et al. 2010, 54)

Voices of operant and formal theologies were the voices most identifiable in this research. The voice of operant theology is inferred as Facebook and friendship practices are discussed in the fieldwork and analysed in the situational analysis. Theologies of friendship offered by theologians represent formal theology. These were used to challenge and were allowed to be challenged by the assumptions and values of operant theologies heard in the Facebook and friendship practices described. It was recognized that the contexts of both the theological and the operant voices may have a significant effect on understandings of friendship.

Less apparent from this research are espoused and normative voices of theology. The participants were not asked specifically to articulate their faith beliefs. What they said about their friends and their faith as they described their Facebook practices could be interpreted as fragments representing espoused theologies but not in the sense of a deliberate declaration of faith. Individual participants are influenced by the normative theology of their own church or group. However, since the participants represented a variety of denominational and para-church experiences, a single theological authority other than scripture, could not be named as a normative voice. Further, there is not necessarily an expectation that all participants share the same interpretation of scripture. TAR authors recognize that the four voices of theology are not entirely discrete (Cameron et al. 2010).

In the terminology of the ARCS, a voice emerged from the synthesis of the analysis of the data, context, and theology involved in the practices of Facebook, friendship and faith of the young

adult Christians. A voice of theology heard through social media embodies contextualized assumptions and values that contain fragments of theological understandings. When the practices are connected through theological reflection it is expressed in intention, discernment, affirmation and demonstration. These characteristics may be manifested in revised forms of the practices. This is not meant to suggest a fifth voice of theology to be added to the framework developed by the ARCS project. Instead it brings awareness that a voice of theology is making itself heard through social media interaction that incorporates aspects of the other theological voices described.

In a significant way the concept of ordinary theology differs from the interpretation required in using the ‘four voices’ approach. In listening for the operant voice of theology, inferences of belief are made based on the interpreter’s understanding or observation of practices. While these interpretations may accurately describe actual practices, it is not ordinary theology in the sense that Astley uses the term. That is not to say that young adult Christians practising friendship are not reflecting their ordinary theology. But according to Astley’s use of the term, it is not ordinary theology until it is reflective, articulated, written, or in the corresponding terminology, espoused. In discussing the use of the ‘four voices’ in a specific example, Pete Ward contributes an understanding that also calls for making the theology explicit:

We need to make connections between everyday expression and the presence of God in explicit ways. ... Fundamentally I am suggesting that to get at this habituated theology a deeper exploration of practice is required or at least a clearer focus on how the theological is carried in bodies and sensibilities and how the presence of God weaves in and out and through practice. (Ward 2008, 28–29)

We began that task here by asking young adult Christians to consider their Facebook and friendship practices as a part of their practices of faith. We are acknowledging that the learning and theology of each person is significant through inviting, asking, listening, and confirming young adult Christians’ descriptions of their own practices of Facebook, friendship and faith. In this way, the fieldwork process of this study helped to open eyes, hearts, and minds to the connectedness of all aspects of living in response to a calling in Christ. Continuing reflection is observed through the following illustrations of revision in practices.

6.2 Examples of revised practices

Intention and discernment emerged as practical responses from the encounter of Facebook, friendship and faith practices of young adult Christians related to the origination and persistence of friendship. When the practices engage through activities of witness and mission, affirmation and demonstration are applied responses. These outcomes become present or heightened in any or all of the practices of young adult Christians as they are connected in theological reflection. Revised practices continue to emerge and evolve as awareness that a voice of theology is heard through social media becomes more attuned. The theoretical approach, the practices, and the basic analysis question, are summarized in Table 6.1.

TABLE 6.1.

Theory: Swinton & Mowat's stages in practical theology	Application: Practices to consider and connect	Analysis: Question
Experience as models	Facebook practices	What they said – how they use Facebook
Situational analysis	Friendship practices	How they practise – the context for their practices of friendship
Theological analysis	Faith practices	What they hear – from the church about friendship
Synthesis of analyses	Revised practices	What they express – in their friendships through social media

Based on the research and reflection of this study, young adult Christians engaging with methods of practical theology to consider their Facebook, friendship and faith practices could develop revised Facebook-friendship practices by responding to the following question in several ways.

Since it is a significant factor in the current practices of friendship, what is the role of Facebook in my practices of friendship as a Christian?

Possible responses include: not consciously revising practices; abstaining from using Facebook for a specific reason or period; discontinuing use of Facebook for theological reasons; using Facebook for theological reasons. It is appropriate to again listen to voices of young adult Christians describing reflective decisions about practising friendship and Facebook as a part of

their faith practices. These illustrations draw together the various threads developed through the research and add a rich layer to the ongoing discussion of the relationship of church and culture, faith and practice.

6.2.1 *Affirming current Facebook practices*

Although suggestions for revised forms of practice may emerge from reflection on their situation within a cultural context as well as from Christian traditions of friendship and their own understandings of friendship and its practices, a possible response is to make no changes in current Facebook practices. This response could occur for a number of reasons. One's habits of friendship could be so firmly established that change would be difficult or inconvenient. For some, conformance to peer group performance and expectations is a strong influence on behaviour and practices. With numerous connections to people from multiple categories, the peer group is not likely to be limited to other Christians. Revising friendship practices in ways that threaten a cultural value for convenience and connection is likely to be noticed by others. Responding to challenges requires a well-considered understanding of one's own theology and the ability to articulate it. Some young adult Christians may not be at a point where they can articulate their theological beliefs even when it is based on reflection on assumptions, values or other theologies that inform their faith. Thus they may not be willing to make revisions in their practices until they feel comfortable in their ability to explain and defend their theology of friendship. Joseph revealed this ambivalence in regard to his Facebook practices:

It's [Facebook is] silly, not necessary but I can't leave it now. But wish I never joined it in the first place.

Responses of two other participants revealed no plans to revise Facebook practices but for very different reasons than conformance to peer expectations or ambivalence. Nick and Tim's comments indicate their reflection on the value of Facebook to their friendship and faith practices.

Nick: As a christian my faith does effect how I use Facebook, when I got ill first I kinda lost all sense of who I was and became the illness, i had to give up my work and my hobbies, my confidence was wrecked and if I'm being honest I sort of became a recluse almost. I went to church on a Sunday and I did my duties but that was about it. Long story short some things happened and September of last year I decided to come back to the young adult meetings (at church). ... And my whole life has sort of

blossomed again, because of all the friendships I've made and social media is such a big part of the whole friendship experience now. [Written text of Nick emailed to researcher. No editing applied.]

Tim described a painful experience he had gone through that caused him to stop attending church. Facebook provided the means to stay connected to personal friends and receive what he needed in terms of healing. He described it with the following words:

What Facebook did was let me relate to people in church because I couldn't go any more. ... In Facebook, I could contact and have little chats. It was like a balm, an ointment that took away some of the pain. Quite powerful. In pain and loneliness even if you couldn't see them but just seeing their picture meant a lot ... it took away some of the pain. It was ameliorating hurt. Imagine if you had hurt and had to go through it on your own. Facebook was there and has done it because of people saying yes to me as a friend, they are saying yes to relationship with me. ... It filled up a hole.

Tim's experience caused him to revise his faith practice of attending a particular church and rely for a time on the connection and support he received from friends through Facebook. This was the opposite of Nick's experience of coming back to church and using Facebook to augment the friendships found there. Tim went on to say, 'Facebook changed my life; I don't take this lightly.' At the time of the interview, Tim had again revised his faith practice by joining another church and becoming quite active in its ministry, fellowship, and mission.

Tim revealed that he often wrote poetry to describe his feelings. During the interview he spontaneously said that if he wrote a poem about Facebook it would be this:

I love Facebook.

I love Facebook.

Enjoying people closer to me.

Allowing Christ to come through me to them.

The question mark is, am I doing what I can, being a Christian or all I should be for them?

I hope I'm getting it right.

I know I'm a bit weird sometimes.

Perhaps I'm meant to be.

I hope my weirdness is appropriate weirdness that expresses God's love, God's mind, God's thoughts.

God help me get this right on Facebook.

Facebook is not a joke. Facebook is a tool.

He concluded his recitation of his poem by saying, 'That's from my heart.'

The research shows that while not revising Facebook practices, some young adult Christians continuously consider and make decisions relative to the origination and persistence of friendships. Consciously or not, they are involved in activities of witness and mission through Facebook. By engaging in theological reflection to the extent that they strive to be more intentional in their decisions in using Facebook and more discerning in their friendship activities, they can realize the witness and mission taking place through their affirmation and demonstration.

6.2.2 Revising practices by abstaining from using Facebook for a specific reason or period

Abstaining from using Facebook is a possible revision of practices based on theological reflection. Several participants in the study indicated that this was a discipline that they had imposed upon themselves from time to time when they felt they were spending too much time on Facebook, realized it was becoming a priority for them, or that it was causing them to lose focus from or desire for the things they valued as part of their faith.

According to one source, Facebook, and other social media, are among the top items given up during Lent.³⁹ That some Christians view giving up Facebook as a sacrifice is an interesting phenomena that speaks to the value placed on Facebook. Giving up social media for Lent might put it in the category of habits people recognize as detrimental and wish to rid themselves of. This way of observing Lent is a kick-start to breaking a bad habit. Or, it could be

³⁹ http://blog.christianitytoday.com/ctliveblog/archives/2012/02/what_people_gav_1.html; <http://blog.christianitytoday.com/ctliveblog/archives/2013/02/what-to-give-up-for-lent-twitter-reveals-the-top-100-choices.html>; <http://www.nbc33tv.com/news/national-news/ten-most-popular-items-pe>; <http://charlotte.cbslocal.com/2013/02/12/top-ten-most-popular-things-people-give-up-for-lent/#photo-6>.

a practice that is highly valued and doing without it is a sacrifice. If in the light of theological reflection, the action is a response to how Facebook is affecting one's friendship practices and relationships, it can be a meaningful experience. Posting about his decision to give up Facebook for Lent, Jim Watkins⁴⁰ explains his considerations and theological reflection:

So, what does Facebook have to do with a theology of desire? I think that Facebook can be a powerful tool through which we seek to satisfy our desires to love ourselves and to be loved, and to love our neighbours. If Facebook can help us to satisfy these desires then, it seems to me, Facebook is helpful. If, on the other hand, Facebook disorients these desires, then it is harmful.

I want to put to the side the argument over whether Facebook is a "neutral" tool and focus on one way that using Facebook may disorder our values and disorient our desires. Facebook is sometimes like a window, or a magnifying glass, through which we imagine ourselves. As we seek to satisfy our desires by using Facebook, we can, at the same time, acquire a disordered value of self. Much has, in fact, been written on the way that Facebook encourages an inflated (narcissism) or deflated (voyeurism) value of self. In both cases, our desires are disoriented and we are left discontent because Facebook overwhelms us with the possibilities of what our lives *could* look like and the sense that I *could* be whatever I make of myself on Facebook.

... This year, I am giving up Facebook for Lent. I don't want a new self-imposed rule, and I certainly don't want to engage in any monastic self-flagellation. What I want is to take a fresh look at how I satisfy the desires that I use Facebook to satisfy, and I want to re-orient them toward their ultimate goal in the loving communion of the Triune God.⁴¹

Watkins' post recognizes many of the topics considered in the analysis sections of this research. It demonstrates a young adult Christian's awareness of and reflection on the multi-faceted implications of his Facebook, friendship and faith practices. He prioritizes his faith practices to love God, self, and others. He acknowledges the role of causality in technology use that affects Facebook practices in his desire to consciously orient his friendship practices. Lent

⁴⁰ Jim Watkins is a young adult Christian but was not a participant in the fieldwork of this project.

⁴¹ Watkins, James. 2013. "Lent, Facebook and Desire," *Transpositions* (blog), February 18, <http://www.transpositions.co.uk/2013/02/lent-facebook-and-desire/>.

is a period for focused reflection and preparation for the events of Holy Week in the Christian liturgical calendar. Using the period of Lent can be an appropriate opportunity to employ or adapt methods of practical theology to consider Facebook, friendship and faith practices.

6.2.3 Revising practices by discontinuing use of Facebook for theological reasons

A more unusual response to theological consideration of the use of Facebook for Christians is to never begin using it or to cease using it. Ceasing to use Facebook was the subject of Daniel's letter to his Facebook-friends presented at the beginning of this thesis.

Daniel made the decision to discontinue using Facebook after hearing John Bell speak at a conference. Bell discussed three topics related to the use of Facebook (see note 12). The first is the consideration of time, suggesting a shift from thinking about 'spending' time to 'using' time. Even devices meant to save time, such as email, may actually steal time through an endless stream of attention paid to trivial matters. He suggests understanding time as a faith issue: seeing it as belonging to God. This concept coheres well with an admonition to use time differently and more faithfully. For young adult Christians practising friendship in a consumerist culture, how time is used becomes another choice among many. But while Facebook saves time through the ability to communicate to multiple individuals and groups of people at one time or keeping by up with others by a post or a glance, it may also be stealing time from other valued choices. Daniel's response to Bell's remarks on time in regard to Facebook prompted him to explain to his friends his decision to discontinue using Facebook in the following way:

Facebook consumes a lot of time. A lot. I could be reading. Learning a new instrument. Getting my act together and learning Greek or Russian or German. I could be baking yummy cakes for my friends. Writing new articles, poetry. Discovering new authors. Actually doing something near the recommended reading in my foreign languages. With Facebook out of my life, I hope to do more, be more productive and have more time for genuine relaxation. Finally, there is something a wee bit more romantic and reminiscent of a better age to have communication that is personalised.

The second issue in Bell's talk that Daniel responded to was 'depth'. He asked his listeners to consider if various activities enacted through Facebook, such as loss of inhibitions or public defamation of others, 'deepen' or 'cheapen' life. He questioned if the openness practised through Facebook brings them closer to people they care about or if it really just offers

vicarious entertainment to those whom they rarely see. Bell explains knowledge is easy to obtain but it is not enough; wisdom is needed. Daniel responded to Bell's remarks about depth by telling his friends:

I have lots of 'friends' who I don't know, barely talk to or rarely see. People I've met once as Facebook friends. People I know about. People who added me by accident. And I've got a bit bored of wearing my heart on my sleeve to them and distributing private information to people I don't really know.

Bell also discussed narcissism in Facebook but this was not a reason for disconnecting from Facebook that Daniel mentioned in his letter to his friends. Instead, he focused on his dissatisfaction with privacy issues, which in some sense could have a narcissistic element to it. Bell concluded by saying that Jesus could never be just a Facebook-friend. All of us must be open to all of him. We become friends through his example, not our devices. Bell encouraged his audience to recognize tools as tools not substitutes for people.

Daniel engaged in theological reflection regarding his practices of Facebook, friendship and faith after hearing Bell's message. He responded with revised forms of faithful practice that he described in the Facebook message to his friends. He indicated his desire for becoming more intentional in the friendships he participated in and more discerning in how he practised friendship with his friends. Without mentioning his Christian faith in his letter to his friends, he affirmed what was important to him in friendship. Although this could be considered to be an exclusion of explicit witness to his identity as a Christian, Daniel had already demonstrated in multiple ways over the course of his friendships, including through his presence on Facebook, that he was a committed Christian and active participant in church- and faith-based activities.

Establishing this revised friendship practice, Daniel did not use Facebook for nearly a year. Based on upcoming changes in his location, he later reactivated his account which reinstated the Facebook-friends who had previously been linked through it. Using Facebook was simply the most convenient way to stay connected to the many people who are Facebook-friends as he studied and worked abroad. Additionally, it provided a way for him to easily make connections with new friends in his new location and disclose his identity as a Christian to them.

6.2.4 Revising practices by using Facebook for theological reasons

An example of a revised practice to resume using Facebook, based on reflection on friendship, is that of Matthew.⁴² He discontinued active use of Facebook as an ideological stance against the business practices of Facebook, explaining it in a post on his blog. In another blog post he made a year after he made this decision regarding his Facebook practices, he discussed thoughts he was having about his friendship practices.

I was talking with April last night about how I build relationships with people, a conversation that began at my bi-weekly prayer meeting with Jonny and Matt. I've met some people lately and thought, "We should be friends," but I don't really know how to make that happen. I am not what you might call a naturally charismatic fellow. An easy rapport with others is an enigma to me. But I know some people who seem like they ought to be friends because we have lots of mutual friends as well as mutual interests.

The problem is that I only build friendships in two different ways for 99.9% of the people I know. My friendships are either built over the course of years around a D&D table, or they're built in the core of a traumatic event. The first method limits itself to a handful of people, and while the second has resulted in a surprising number of good friendships (born out of a need to comfort and support one another), it's not exactly the happiest way to establish a relationship. To be fair, there is a third method which is stumbling upon someone who is the same brand of weird that I am, but that is exceedingly rare.

As April and I talked about our definitions of "friend" and how we go about building a rapport with someone, she said that our friend Courtney is really the best at this. And what Courtney does is very, very simple: first, she asks people to get together over coffee, and second, she checks in with them regularly to let them know she is thinking about them. We're pretty sure those are the two practical aspects, but Courtney has some magic as well, which is that she really likes people. Or at least, she makes you feel that she genuinely likes you and is interested in how you are. And she's also an awesome person that pretty much everyone looks up to, so when she checks in with you, it's a special blessing. Anytime someone you respect and admire takes the time to

⁴² Matthew is a young adult Christian but was not a participant in the fieldwork of this project.

ask how you are and they really mean it, that has a positive impact on you and starts to build that rapport, or trust relationship, or friendship.

It almost convinced me to give Facebook another go. Something Courtney does is to comment on people's Facebook pages and leave them messages letting them know she's thinking of them.⁴³

Several months later he posted again, revealing that he had been continuing to reflect on the stance he took in response to Facebook business practices in relation to how it was affecting his friendship practices.

And now my 10 year high school reunion is coming up, which is all organized through a Facebook group. It has me seriously reconsidering my involvement with the social network. Their business practices haven't changed, and everyone I know continues to hate Facebook while also continuing to use it. But I want to reconnect with some people, and the last year and a half has shown me that it likely won't happen any other way.

... Just earlier this year, I wrote about making and maintaining friendships, and I read again about Courtney messaging people on Facebook to let them know she's thinking about them. She lets them know she cares about them and that she's available to talk.

I've been conflicted for days about this. It probably seems dumb to you, but I took an ideological stance against Facebook and how they do business, and none of that has changed. So in a sense, it seems wrong and a little hypocritical to rebuild my network there. At the same time, I'm thinking a lot about friendships and relationships and communication ...

And I wonder if the end doesn't justify the means. Maybe Facebook sucks, but isn't connecting with people more important? It is for April, and as she and I have discussed this, that's what she comes back to: what's important to her is being available. She wants it to be easy for people to reach her.

I do too, and I've comforted myself by saying that I am easy to find on-line. Just do a Google search of my name ... even if you misspell it, you can probably find me. But I'm

⁴³ Stublefield, Matthew. 2013. "How Do You Build a Friendship?" *Personal Blog of Matthew Stublefield*, January 16, <http://mstublefield.com/general/how-do-you-build-a-friendship>.

beginning to think that is disingenuous. There's a difference between being easy to track down and being available. And the latter is something that I have to communicate to people. I can't be passively available. Instead, I need to be reaching out to them and letting them know I'm thinking about them, I care about them, and I'm interested in how they are doing.

If they live on Facebook and I have no other means of reaching them, then maybe that's where I need to be.⁴⁴

Matthew does not cite specific theological reasons for his decision to take an ideological stance against Facebook's business practices nor in his decision to resume using Facebook. Yet in saying that his decision is because Facebook is a convenient way to be connected and available to others in friendship, he affirms the value to him of friendship. Since his Christian faith is significant in how he defines who he is, this thesis argues that his practices of faith should connect with his other practices. It is the process that Matthew engages in, not a specific outcome, which characterizes this as an example of the reflection sought for in the use of methods of practical theology. He is intentional in his use of Facebook to be available to friends, discerning that there are important differences in the ways that various friends connect and communicate. He affirms who he is as one who values others and relationships, and although Facebook is not the medium for connecting in friendship that he is comfortable with, he sacrifices his own preference for the opportunity to be of service to others – demonstrating mission through his practice.

In circumstances different from those of Matthew, Daniel described his decision to return to Facebook in the following email to the researcher:

Social networking sites are great for just that – socially networking. It means, for example, I have had to go back onto Facebook to keep up to date with the lives of people back in Scotland, and to get to know people here quickly. They are a great way of finding out about development in people's lives who are removed from my immediate day-to-day contact, and to support and pray for those I care about. At the same time, I think that, were I in more 'normal' circumstances (being a loose word in

⁴⁴ Stublefield, Matthew. 2013. "Reconsidering Facebook." *Personal Blog of Matthew Stublefield*, April 14, <http://mstublefield.com/general/reconsidering-facebook>.

the 21st century), I would not be investing as much time in social networking as I do at the moment, when it is one of my only connections with friends back at home.

His use of Facebook becomes a friendship practice that is a space where he continues to be able to affirm his identity as a Christian, that provides opportunities for demonstrations of his faith, allows him to be more intentional in regard to his relationship to each person, and is managed with increased awareness of the role and value of each relationship. Reflecting on his experience, on and off Facebook, and living in a foreign culture, Daniel came to this conclusion about using Facebook in the practice of friendship:

social networking sites, in my opinion, can never provide a forum for friendship. They can, however, work quite nicely for notes, networking, acquaintances and random little things in life.

Returning to Facebook should not be considered a failure in using methods of practical theology, but rather a success in the examples of Matthew and Daniel. Their experiences demonstrate a reflexive process of identifying a practice, considering the cultural context in which they operate, critically reflecting on the practices of church, scripture, and tradition, and continuously revising practices. In reply to a question about the effect of his Christian understandings on his friendship practices, Daniel made the following statement:

I would hope that all my practices are affected by my Christian understanding! With specific regards to friendship, I think I maybe would be more inclined to put friendship before personal success or fame, and more willing to give up time for friendship than I might be if I weren't Christian, simply because I know myself to be a driven and competitive person; the Christian gospel is one that always reminds me of the context in which I am living and therefore maybe tempers these aspects of my personality.

Daniel's statement indicates reflection on his practices, contexts, and faith, with an understanding of their connectedness.

A revised practice as a result of engaging with methods of practical theology is neither prescribed nor static. The various responses to the challenges to theological expressions of friendship are examples of young adult Christians wrestling with theological considerations such as exclusion, inclusion, and particularity in friendship. Reflection and revision of practices are parts of a continuous cycle of affirming God and one's Christian identity in witness,

demonstrating faith through mission enabled by our friendship with God, being intentional in becoming friends through God, and discerning God and his gift in each friendship.

6.3 Conclusions

6.3.1 *Application*

This study is about the practice of friendship for young adult Christians situated within particular social and technological contexts. By attending to the descriptions and accounts of their Facebook-friendship practices, we identified assumptions and values that appeared to be important to them. Their articulations embodied fragments and hints of theological values rather than a fully developed theology of friendship. Elements of their friendship practices and theological understandings of friendship both affirmed and challenged each other when they encountered and engaged. Reflection on the encounter and engagement of significant issues of friendship that emerged from the analysis led to outcomes that could be realized through connection in revised practices of Facebook, friendship or faith.

The questions considered and answered through the research were:

How do young adult Christians practise friendship on Facebook?

How are practices of young adult Christians affirmed and challenged by, or are themselves affirming and challenging, other Christian understandings of friendship?

These questions were answered through the course of this study using methods of practical theology to stimulate analysis and reflection on friendship within relevant contexts and theologically. The theological considerations involve reflecting on how Christ demonstrated, thus taught about, friendship. These reflections could lead to an understanding of friendship as a school of Christian love. More challenging theological ideas include being in friendship with God and realizing friends as gifts from God. The types of questions suggested by this research for young adult Christians to consider in theological reflection on their own Facebook and friendship practices included:

What is God's role in my friendships with others?

How can I practise friendship in ways that are intentional and consistent with my faith?

Are my friendships with other Christians mutually helpful in following and growing closer to Christ?

Are there theologically sound reasons to maintain connections, such as Facebook-friend connections, with people at all levels of friendship?

How do I know God and how do I make myself known to others?

Who do I say Christ is and why is that relevant to my practices of friendship, including Facebook?

Can my relationship with God be one of friendship? How does that affect my understanding of friendship with others?

Are my friendship practices a faithful response to my understanding of God's commands to me to love one another and to make disciples of all men?

If Facebook is a significant factor in the current practices of friendship, what is its role in my practices of friendship as a Christian?

Consideration of these types of questions take place within social and technological contexts that make it possible to have convenient means of being connected to many others.

Complicating the reflection is the fact that all the people connected through Facebook are labelled 'friend'. Understandings of 'friend' can be considered in terms of the origination and persistence of each friendship. One may strive to practise friendship in ways are intentional and discerning. What is communicated through friendship and its significance for Christians is witness and mission. These activities are enabled through affirmation and demonstration.

Each person engaging in theological reflection on their friendship practices will consider their own situations and understandings in a personal way, thus answers cannot be presumed or prescribed. However based on the research and process in this study, the following arguments have been made to answer the questions of the research:

Young adult Christians embody their assumptions and values in their Facebook friendship practices.

Facebook friendship practices of young adult Christians demonstrate assumptions and values situated within particular social and technological contexts.

Facebook friendship practices of young adult Christians both affirm and challenge theological understandings of friendship.

An encounter of Facebook, friendship and faith practices of young adult Christians regarding understandings of the origination and persistence of friendship suggests outcomes of intention and discernment in practices.

Facebook, friendship and faith practices of young adult Christians engage through witness and mission providing outcomes of affirmation and demonstration of faith.

The encounter and engagement in Chapter 5 brought out the considerations for theological reflection to connect the practices through intention, discernment, affirmation, and demonstration, depicted again as Table 6.2.

TABLE 6.2.

	Considerations	Theological Reflection	Outcome through Connection of Practices
Encounter	Origination of friendship	What is friendship?	Intention
	Persistence in friendships	How can I realize the purpose in each friendship?	Discernment
Engagement	Witness to Knowing God	Who do I say He is and what difference does it make in my friendships?	Affirmation
	Mission of Sharing God	What is my calling in friendship?	Demonstration

The practical theology cycle is adapted in Figure 6.3 to demonstrate its application to Facebook-friendship practices resulting in a voice of theology heard through social media. The arrows indicate that a voice of theology heard through social media becomes part of the continuing cycle of asking, listening, reflecting and revising practices of Facebook, friendship and faith that is practical theology.

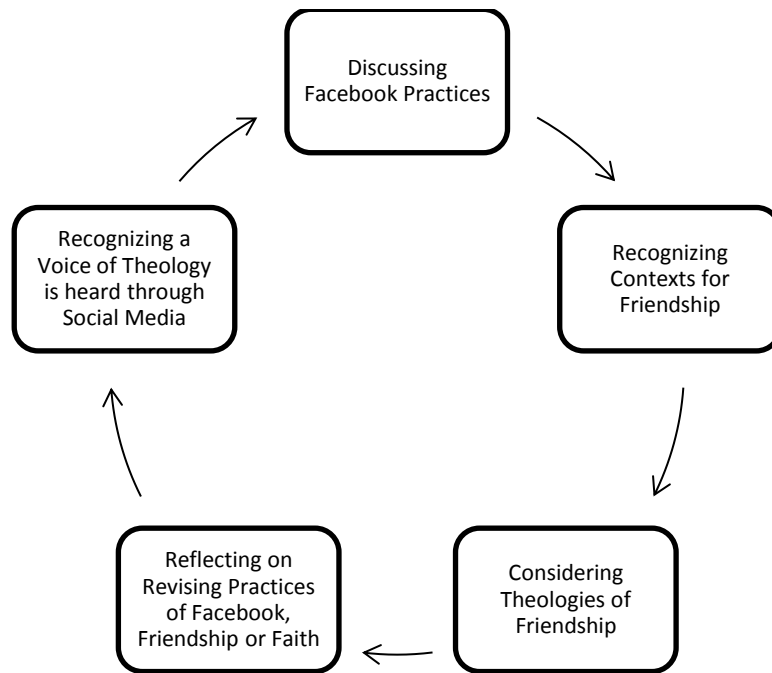


FIGURE 6.3.

Methods of practical theology are employed for the church’s ultimate purpose of glorifying God. This study focused on an aspect of that glorification through friendship. Friendship is both quite ordinary and highly significant. Encouraging reflection on its practices can prompt actions that lead us closer to understanding and faithfully responding to our call in Christ. It is a difficult task because so much seems ambiguous when discussing spirituality while living in a world influenced by consumerism and material interests. But Christians define the world in terms of God’s purposes and move towards meeting his ends through all the contexts in which they engage. Young adult Christians are expanding the fragments of assumptions and values that they embody in their practices that serve to glorify God. Christians trust in God to see his purposes fulfilled through faithful practices of his people.

6.3.2 Limitations, areas for further research, contribution

The demographic of the participants was limited to young adult Christians accessible to the researcher at the University of St Andrews in St Andrews, Scotland and through her home church and university in Springfield, MO, USA. Although the participants represented a fairly specific theological bent, the diversity within the sample (nationality, denomination, gender) allowed various perspectives to be represented within the sample demographic. The research could be repeated with groups representing different faith traditions and demographics to

explore other experiences of practices of Facebook, their correspondence with their context and theologies, and revised practices resulting from their reflection.

By focusing this study on a specific area of an important everyday practice, the research aspired to encourage the young adult Christian participants in their consideration of other everyday practices as aspects of their faith. This study focused on the types of friendships most commonly associated with Facebook use. As a result, the dynamics of friendship with family members and significant others was only considered collaterally. Based on these research findings, Facebook-friendship practices would have less relevance in a different study that focused on practices of friendship with family members and significant others.

Use of the conversational method to disclose theology is a significant aspect of this initial research but the full utilization and benefits of open and continued ongoing reflective theological conversation could not be realized within the scope of this project due to the limits of accessibility to the participants. As a result, the characteristics and goals of Theological Action Research as formative transformation of practice and as a method of allowing practice to contribute to the transformation of theology are only presented as possibilities. To be more consistent with the methods of theological action research, further studies could be continued over a longer period of time to complete at least one full rotation of the practical theology cycle. Different results might be realized in a longitudinal study with a control group. Yet there were several instances when participants indicated to the researcher that the discussion of Facebook practices as an aspect of their Christian faith and practice had prompted further reflection, discussion with friends, and changes in practices. This study serves as an illustration of the application of the methods to prompt reflective practices for the participants, demonstrate functional outcomes for the readers, and offer a model for further research.

This project should be the catalyst for applying method of practical theology to other areas of everyday practices of Christians, as well as continuous consideration of friendship itself. Example of areas for further analysis are not limited and could include practices involving work responsibilities, family relationships, participation in church, volunteer activities, evangelism opportunities, worship, and missional responses. In asking, listening, considering contexts, and reflecting on theological aspects of ordinary practices, Christians can affirm and demonstrate their faith with intention and discernment through their practices. Methods of practical theology can assist in leading to more faithful practices within particular situational contexts and utilizing the resources available, including social media and whatever follows.

This study builds on and contributes to both knowledge and to practice in its application of theory to current practice. Established frameworks for considering the relationship of faith and culture provided a solid foundation for using methods of practical theology to further explore that relationship relative to a specific practice in a contemporary context. Those foundations of knowledge were expanded on and contributed to by using more recent developments in theory and the results of this research to further the conversation. This thesis contributes specifically to these four areas of literature and discussion: Practical Theology; Christ and Culture; New Media, Religion and Digital Culture; Christian Education. This thesis will provide an historical basis for study as newer forms of connectivity emerge.

Theologically, scripture and tradition continue to provide a rich and powerful resource for understanding relationships between God and his creation, and among the created ones. Very traditional theological understandings of friendship were allowed to speak to a new generation of young Christians as they were examined, reflected on and brought into conversation with theological perspectives that included feminist, liberation, and queer theologies.

Methods of practical theology were adopted, adapted and furthered by this study. The pastoral cycle was adapted and interpreted considering additional practical theological concepts such as ordinary theology and the 'four voices' of theology. This study contributed to the field of practical theology in applying those concepts based on the subjects and data analysed regarding practices of friendship of young adult Christians.

The applicability of various social theories was tested within a specific population. Ongoing development in conceptualizations of culture and social theory are advanced through their application to a current and particular set of circumstances. The articulated experience of the current generation of young adults contributes new data to social, developmental, and communication studies. As methods and tools for communicating continue to be developed, this study contributes to knowledge by providing an example for using methods of practical theology to consider how practices are being affected by technology use and where is God in the midst of these developments.

The practice of friendship is of ongoing importance and interest. While this study contributes to knowledge in the broader sense, it also makes a significant contribution to the participants and further readers. The young adult Christians who talked about their friendship practices

through Facebook were asked to think about an everyday practice as a demonstration of their faith. Some of them later revealed that from that point on they began to think differently about how they used Facebook and the effect they were having on others in ways they had not seriously considered previously. Reflection extends to other practices and other areas of life. As insights are affirmed, reformed, or discovered, Christians revise practices in ways that respond better to their understanding of their call in Christ. Theological reflection changes practices and there is a ripple effect. Practices of contemporary Christians continue the long tradition of being a blessing to others through friendship.

6.3.3 Letter to young adult Christians

This thesis began with a letter to friends from Daniel, a young adult Christian considering his Facebook and friendship practices as he reflected on his faith. It is fitting to conclude this thesis with a letter to the young adult Christian friends who participated in the study.

Dear friends,

Thank you for your participation in this study. It was significant. You were enthusiastic about being asked, listened to, and respected. You were curious about what I was learning in the process, wondering both 'what is the connection' and 'how can I do this better?' in regard to your everyday practices. The conversations we shared about how you practise friendship using Facebook provided insight into your assumptions and values while prompting further reflection.

You have your own distinctive theological voice that is heard through the many ways you interact with friends, including your activities on Facebook and other social media. My response to your question of doing Facebook, friendship and faith better, is to encourage you to acknowledge and value your theological voice as it is situated within your own contexts. You may bear the most recognizable face of God that some of your friends see, so be intentional in allowing your voice to describe who you are and who you want to become. Discern your role within your friendships so that you can affirm your understanding of who you are called to be as a Christian and a friend. Don't be afraid to make changes to any of your practices as you seek to be a better friend and more faithful to your calling in Christ; your theological voice will be heard through the demonstration of their connectedness.

My gratitude and prayers for you continue, Cathy

Appendix

1. University of St. Andrews, University Teaching and Research Committee Approval
DI7402 14 April 2011
2. University of St. Andrews, University Teaching and Research Committee Approval Final
Amendment approved 10 May 2012



University of St Andrews

University Teaching and Research Ethics Committee

14 April 2011

Ms Cathryn Van Landuyt

School of Divinity

Ethics Reference No: <i>Please quote this ref on all correspondence</i>	DI7402
Project Title:	Theologically Considering Friendship in a Facebook Culture
Researchers Name(s):	Ms Cathryn Van Landuyt
Supervisor(s):	Dr E Stoddart

Thank you for submitting your application which was considered at the School of Divinity's School Ethics Committee meeting on the 23 February 2011. The following documents were reviewed:

- | | |
|---|--------------------|
| 1. Ethical Application Form | 13/04/11 (amended) |
| 2. Participant Information Sheet | 13/04/11 (amended) |
| 3. Consent Form | 13/04/11 (amended) |
| 4. Debriefing Form | 13/04/11 (amended) |
| 5. External Permissions | n/a |
| 6. Letters to Parents/Children/Headteacher etc... | n/a |
| 7. Questionnaires | 13/04/11 (amended) |

8. Enhanced Disclosure Scotland and Equivalent n/a (*as necessary*)

The University Teaching and Research Ethics Committee (UTREC) approves this study from an ethical point of view. Please note that where approval is given by a School Ethics Committee that committee is part of UTREC and is delegated to act for UTREC.

Approval is given for three years. Projects, which have not commenced within two years of original approval, must be re-submitted to your School Ethics Committee.

You must inform your School Ethics Committee when the research has been completed. If you are unable to complete your research within the 3 three year validation period, you will be required to write to your School Ethics Committee and to UTREC (where approval was given by UTREC) to request an extension or you will need to re-apply.

Any serious adverse events or significant change which occurs in connection with this study and/or which may alter its ethical consideration, must be reported immediately to the School Ethics Committee, and an Ethical Amendment Form submitted where appropriate.

Approval is given on the understanding that the 'Guidelines for Ethical Research Practice' (<http://www.standrews.ac.uk/media/UTRECguidelines%20Feb%2008.pdf>) are adhered to.

Yours sincerely

Margot Clement, for

Convenor of the School Ethics Committee

Ccs: Dr E Stoddart, Supervisor

School Ethics Committee

UTREC Convenor, Mansefield, 3 St Mary's Place, St Andrews, KY16 9UY
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The University of St Andrews is a charity registered in Scotland: No SC013532



23 May 2012

Ms Cathryn Van Landuyt

School of Divinity

Project Title	Theologically Considering Friendship in a Facebook Culture
Researchers Name(s)	Cathryn Van Landuyt
Supervisor(s)	Dr E Stoddart
Department/Unit	School of Divinity
Ethical Approval Code (Approval allocated to Original Application)	DI7402
Original Application Approval Date	13 April 2011
Amendment Application Approval	10 May 2012

Ethical Amendment Approval

Thank you for submitting your amendment application which was considered at the School of Divinity's School Ethics Committee meeting on 10 May 2012. The following documents were reviewed:

1. Ethical Amendment Application Form 10.05.2012
2. Participant Information Sheet N/A
3. Consent Form N/A
4. Debriefing Form N/A
5. External Permissions N/A
6. Letters to Parents/Children/Headteacher etc... N/A

7. Questionnaires N/A
8. Enhanced Disclosure Scotland and Equivalent N/A (*as necessary*)

The University Teaching and Research Ethics Committee (UTREC) approves this study from an ethical point of view. Please note that where approval is given by a School Ethics Committee that committee is part of UTREC and is delegated to act for UTREC.

Approval is given for three years from the original application only. Ethical Amendments do not extend this period but give permission to an amendment to the original approval research proposal only. If you are unable to complete your research within the original 3 three year validation period, you will be required to write to your School Ethics Committee and to UTREC (where approval was given by UTREC) to request an extension or you will need to re-apply. You must inform your School Ethics Committee when the research has been completed.

Any serious adverse events or significant change which occurs in connection with this study and/or which may alter its ethical consideration, must be reported immediately to the School Ethics Committee, and an Ethical Amendment Form submitted where appropriate.

Approval is given on the understanding that the 'Guidelines for Ethical Research Practice' (<http://www.standrews.ac.uk/media/UTRECguidelines%20Feb%2008.pdf>) are adhered to.

Yours sincerely

Margot Clement, for

Convenor of the School Ethics Committee

Ccs: Dr E Stoddart, Supervisor

SEC

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